

From: Geoff and Katie Davis [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 21 April 2005 12:00 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: [REDACTED] Inquiry into adoption of children from overseas

To the Committee,

We are Geoff and Katie Davis and we live in [REDACTED] in Tasmania. We are awaiting allocation of our first children, two siblings under four, from Ethiopia. Thankyou for the opportunity to express our views on the terms of reference of this enquiry.

1. Any inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes for overseas adoptions.

Approval process:

- We would like to stress that our approval process and all dealings with Tasmania's Department of Health and Human Services, specifically Una Hobday, manager of the Adoption and Information Service, and our worker, Tana McMullen have been excellent - the time from our initial expression of interest to approval was approximately five months, as we were approved for siblings, our file left Australia almost immediately - we are the lucky ones.
- In our opinion, the Tasmanian process works quite well. We know through reports from friends and contacts that this is not the case in other states. What took us months takes years in states such as Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, and there is no consistency in eligibility criteria or 'hoops' potential adoptive parents have to jump through. This is clearly not equitable or in the best interests of families and has lead to several families we know of relocating to states which have quicker, 'friendlier', more efficient programmes.

Fees:

- We both work for the Tasmanian state government and were surprised at the level of fees we incurred from the state throughout this process. We know of no other state agency that requires fees for state-provided services. Indeed, schools are no longer allowed to ask parents for money for excursions, or even require students to bring cooking ingredients. It seems strange to us that the states expect us to pay, in some cases, exorbitant fees for services we should have already covered in our taxes. We can only assume that this reflects the significant lack of funding these services receive.
- Again, living in Tasmania, we are the lucky ones as far as levels of fees go. We pay approximately \$2500 to the state for their services. Again, in other states the fees are much higher. Again, this is not equitable, and when combined with the costs to the relinquishing country, travel, etc, puts intercountry adoption out of reach of many families.

Available countries:

- There is great inconsistency between states as to which programmes are available to prospective parents. For example, approval for Taiwan is available to families in SA, but not Tasmania.
- There are a large number of countries which are signatories to the Hague Convention who do not have programmes with Australia. We assume that this is partly the responsibility of the Federal government, as the Australian signatory to the Convention.

Any inconsistencies between the benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children and those provided to families who have adopted children from overseas.

- Parents of biological children are given benefits and entitlements through Medicare, Health Funds, Maternity allowance, etc. that adoptive parents are not eligible to receive. The costs of having a baby biologically are miniscule, even using assisted reproductive techniques (most of which are also subsidised), compared to the costs of adopting a child from overseas.
- Almost all children who are adopted from overseas are older than six months (the current cut off for the maternity allowance) and many of them are between 1 and 4, with some being older than 10. We are aware that the stated purpose of the maternity allowance is to assist with the setup costs for a new baby, and we have been told by some people that children older than the cut-off do not have the same costs, adopted or not. When you consider that the average adoption for a single child may cost anywhere between twenty and thirty thousand, and siblings even more, this statement is patently ridiculous. Obviously this is much more than setting up for a new baby costs, and when you consider that we also have the 'normal' set-up costs, and on-going costs for medical or psychological issues, adoptive parents are well and truly behind the financial eight-ball. Adoptive families are not generally extremely well off - we're just ordinary, everyday average people - in our case, we both work for the Ed department, we have a mortgage, etc, etc. Adoption for most people means a huge financial sacrifice - equality with biological families, as far as something like the maternity payment goes, helps to address this financial burden.
- It is interesting to note that in the US, adopting families are provided with \$10 000 worth of tax credits to offset some of the cost of adoption, and adoption is much cheaper in the US.
- We are fortunate that we are eligible for paid adoption leave (now an equivalent time to maternity leave in the Tasmanian state service), many people are not, even within the public service, let alone the private sector.
- We are required, by the Tasmanian government to have a parent at home, full-time, for the first year after placement. We believe this is the same in most states. While we do not have a problem with this, it means that we will be living on half of our current income, a situation which, when combined with the cost of the adoption itself as well as set-up costs, is a heavy financial burden. We plan to adopt again, however this may be difficult or have to be a long-term goal, because of the costs involved.
- We feel it is inappropriate for families to be required to pay the \$1245 child immigration fee - in view of the huge assistance biological families receive, this is grossly inequitable.
- I am aware of cases when parents of older children have been denied family payment, because their children are not fully immunised. Clearly, a four year old coming home to Australia from a developing country is not going to have received many, if any, immunisations - this is not the family's fault!

We as adoptive parents, really want things to change to demonstrate what should be an obvious fact: that adoptive families are just families. We will be real parents and our kids will be our kids, regardless where they come from, or how old they are. At the moment, adoption is costly, stressful, lengthy, sometimes heartbreaking, but ultimately rewarding. The Government could do much to streamline this process, reduce costs and inequities and recognise the value and importance of intercountry adoption as a way to build Australian families. Thankyou for your attention to this matter.

Geoff and Katie Davis

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TASMANIA, [REDACTED]