

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 21 April 2005 8:37 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Inquiry into adoption from overseas

RE INQUIRY INTO ADOPTION FROM OVERSEAS

Dear Sir/Madam

We feel compelled to write to you to express our views to the inquiry you are currently conducting into aspects of adoption from overseas countries.

We have been involved in Intercountry Adoption since first attending an Information Night at dhs in Victoria in 1998. During the long, drawn-out process prospective adoptive parents are virtually at the mercy of their respective state departments. The process is explained, but there are many frustrating delays, and no way to speed up the process-which must be followed step by step. Currently the wait is 6-8 months in Victoria between attending an Information Night and registering your "interest", to actually being able to attend Education Groups and start on the endless paperwork. If the departments gave a comprehensive list of paperwork required further along the process, at least adoptive parents would feel as though they were doing something constructive during the wait.

There are many inconsistencies between states regarding age restrictions-some states such as SA, WA and Tasmania enforce that there can be no more than 45 years difference in age between the parents and the child-regardless of what the rulings of the sending country are. Other states are more flexible, and take the sending country into consideration. In the same way there are discrepancies regarding single applicants-Tasmania, SA and Queensland do not allow single applicants, but others do-surely people should not have to move interstate if they are single and wish to become parents, or if they are of a more "mature" age. Most applicants for Intercountry Adoption have been through years of IVF treatments, so are necessarily of a more mature age-yet there would be no restriction on continuing IVF treatments-at a cost to the Australian taxpayers-but they may not be eligible to even apply for Intercountry Adoption-let alone get any subsidies for fees etc. during the process.

We are now the proud parents of Madeleine, aged 2 years 6 months, born in China, and who came home to Australia in November 2003, aged 15 months-yet if we had lived in Tasmania, WA or SA, she would not be our daughter, due to the age restrictions-and we could not imagine our lives without her.

Again, depending on the state concerned, the fees involved can vary greatly. Local adoptions incur virtually no fees, but for Intercountry Adoptions a first application can cost between \$2500 in Tasmania to over \$9500 in NSW-yet the same process is involved no matter which state you live in-surely not that much "cost of living" can be factored in. Coincidentally, the states with the highest fees are the ones with the highest populations, therefore the greater

number of enquiries and applications. It would not be practical to abolish the fees completely, as already overwhelmed and stressed departments would be unable to cope under the influx, and waiting times would extend even further. Most applicants would not object to fees if they were a reasonable amount, and if they did not always appear to be increasing, and if they could see value for their money-most assistance and support during the process comes from parent support groups rather than from the departments. These parent groups are highly informed and motivated and offer applicants much information and insight into the process-more than a part-time worker in the department, who may not necessarily be familiar with each individual country's requirements.

As well as the fees for the state departments, there are also fees payable to the country you are applying to-which can also vary greatly. With some countries, there is a large proportion of this fee(usually payable in USD) which must be paid when your file is actually sent to the country, which is totally non-refundable. If the country should suddenly decide to halt Inter-country Adoptions-as happened to us when we initially applied to Romania-then the applicants have no recourse to attempt to get a refund of some of their money-and the departments here are either unwilling or unable to act on behalf of applicants-it is simply "lost money", and put down to experience.

Yet more fees are applied when you bring your child home from overseas-the DIMIA sponsorship fee of over \$1200, and then the citizenship fee of \$120. In our case the adoption was legalised in China, so Madeleine was already ours, but we had to pay to bring our own child back into the country-which we would not have had to do to bring her home from hospital or to adopt her locally. We are both Australian citizens, born here, and yet we had to pay a fee so that our child could become an Aussie-yet other adoptive parents who are naturalised citizens can have their children made citizens on their citizenship-and not have to pay for the privilege!!! Surely this is reverse discrimination!! In the US these children automatically become citizens upon reaching US soil.

The government is touting their Maternity payment to help populate the country-most Inter-country Adoption children are ineligible to receive this payment as, due to the length of time for processing in their birth country, they are over 6 months of age at placement. This payment is meant to assist with buying equipment and clothing for the child-which adoptive parents still have to do, and adoptive parents are still helping to populate the country, but without the assistance available to biological parents. As well as initial costs involved, the Victorian dept. has a requirement that one parent must remain home with the child for 12 months(again, this varies from state to state)-so the family is then reduced to living on one wage.

If the child is older than 18 months at placement, the Immunisation Allowance may be difficult for adoptive parents to claim-as this must be done before the child turns 2 years, and it can take some time for Paediatrician visits and blood test results before a determination can be made as to what immunisations are still required to be given. The adoptive parents can do

without the added pressure of a tightn time frame to complete yet more paperwork for fear of a computer rejecting their claim-but most Intercountry adoptive parents support immunisation as being in the best interests of their child, so should be encouraged that the Allowance will still be available to them at the discretion of the department.

We trust that this assists you in your deliberations, and look forward to hearing the results of your inquiry. Please feel free to contact us if you require any further information.

Yours Faithfully,
Michael and Barbara Weston

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