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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal
Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission

Dear Secretary,

While the Standing Committee is looking into a nationally consistent framework for local adoption in Australia, I am writing to express my concern that there has been a complete failure in the first instance, to examine whether adoption should be seen as something that is in the best interest of the child.

As an adopted person, I would argue that adoption is not in the best interest of the child, but rather, is in the best interest of childless couples unable to have children of their own. The argument that adoption is in the best interest of the child is pure rationalisation. To stress this point, how can the following be in the child's best interests?

- Removing the child from his or her mother (as a midwife, I know that babies know their mothers at birth).
- Changing the child's original Birth Certificate and replacing it with a legal, but false one.
- Denying the child a true biological identity.
- Having a child live with the notion that his or her mother gave them away to strangers.
- Minimising or depriving him or her of contact and the ability to establish an on-going relationship with their biological family.
- Forcing him or her to go through life knowing that their adoptive family is not their original family and they are different and will always be different than most others.
- Knowing throughout his or her life that they were the last option as your adoptive parents were unable to conceive a child of their own.
- Having to listen to the pro-adopters state publically as part of their strategies to make adoption easier, that adoptees are unwanted children.

While it is difficult for those not adopted to understand adoption from an adopted person's viewpoint, I'll share the following perspective in the hope of enhancing your

understanding. Being adopted is like being separated from everyone else by a picket fence. You can see everyone, you can hear them, you can talk with them, laugh with them and even cry with them, but you can never walk with them on their side of the fence. This is despite the fact that that is all you want to do – be with them on their side of the fence. To relegate any child to the picket fence scenario is simply cruel and inhumane.

As someone who worked in mental health for some 20 years, I met many adopted people in our mental health system. Yet, despite the high proportion of adopted people in the mental health system, no research has been done to ascertain why this might be so. Additionally, it has also been suggested that many of our homeless youth are in fact adopted. Again, no research as to why this might be so.

Being aware that there is some very high profile Australians pushing to change adoption legislation to make it easier to adopt children does not take away your responsibilities to children. Those responsibilities should involve transparently and thoroughly consulting adopted people about their views of adoption and how it has impacted on their lives and what if any alternative options should be made available. This consultation should occur before you look at changing anything to do with adoption.

Having been active in the adoption community for a number of years, I have listened to countless adoptees talk of their experiences. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that if you asked adopted people if they would have preferred to be adopted or not, 100 percent would say they would prefer not to be. They may very well choose their adopted family as their preferred family, but if they had a choice, it would be not to be adopted.

One of the main difficulties for adopted people is speaking out. Indeed, we have been relatively silent because of our fear of hurting or being further rejected by our adoptive families if we do speak out. When we are critical, many attempts are made to silence us with rationalising statements that we are ungrateful, or we just had an unhappy experience with our adoptive family. These statements while largely false are sadly, the accepted norm.

Whereas most in the community would regard adoption as a good thing, this view has not been formulated from listening to adopted people. Adoption, put simply is largely about ownership of another mother's child. It is about satisfying the needs of adults who in most instances are sadly unable to bear their own child. It is about removing the rights of the child in order to satisfy the needs of adults. It's about keeping a false myth going at the expense of truth and sadly, the child.

I acknowledge that there are a small proportion of adults who could conceive a child, but instead choose adoption.

No adult adopted person wants a child growing up in an abusive environment, but let me assure you, there is strong anecdotal evidence that there is no guarantee that being adopted means you will grow up in a non-abusive family. Over the years, I have heard many examples of physical, emotional and sexual abuse from adopted people, but

sadly, no one appears interested in challenging the myth that adoption is a safe option for children.

Permanently removing a child from their biological family should only ever be seen as an absolute last resort measure and should either involve guardianship or permanent care arrangements rather than adoption. When the child is old enough to make the choice for him or herself, then and only then should adoption be the option. Additionally, on-going monitoring of the child's welfare should also be standing policy for the reasons cited in the previous paragraph.

Lastly, while Open Adoption is seen as a solution to a number of issues for the child, let me assure you that it is not. There is an incorrect assumption in Open Adoption that the adoptive parents are going to welcome and openly support the child's contact with his or her biological relatives. There is another incorrect assumption that the child will feel free to openly welcome contact with his or her biological family. These assumptions totally ignore the child's fear of hurting the adoptive parents and experiencing further rejection by not being the perfect adoptive child. By way of example, some years ago, I arrived at a friend's place for dinner. They have two adopted children. The kids, silently mouthed to me at the front door; "We are seeing our real mum tomorrow. Yeah." After dinner, the kids went to bed and the parents asked my advice stating that the kids had a contact meeting with the natural mother the next day, but they had said that they did not want to go. Of course I advised that the kids should be encouraged to attend. Open adoption has never considered the fear of the child of hurting his or her adoptive parents and has always incorrectly assumed that adoptive parents are so emotionally together that they are not going to feel threatened by these visits.

In closing, I have included a copy of a paper I wrote as a result of listening to countless adult adoptees over many years. The paper may assist you in developing some insight regarding the impact adoption can have on far too many adopted people.

I look forward to your response

Yours truly,