

3/04/2018

Committee Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

PO Box 6021

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

To whom it may concern,

I am nineteen years old and hopeful. I am one of Australia's future adoptive parents, and these are my wishes for my children, for our nation's children, and for the system that protects them:

- Australia will reframe its primary goal of "family preservation" as "safe family establishment". Our nation will make loving and safe homes for children a priority and will acknowledge that whilst biological parents have an important role in their children's lives, this may not always be that of a primary caregiver. In these instances, adoption will be considered.
- Birth parents whose children have been removed from their care will continue to be assisted to resolve issues and reclaim custody, however, as has already been shown to be effective in some states, a time frame of six to twelve months will be instated, and if children are still unable to return to their biological parents' care alternative routes to permanency will be sought.

- Australia's child protection system will endeavour to place children in permanent homes at an early age, when possible, in order to reduce disruptions going through cycles of care may cause to identity, home environment, friendships, health care and education. Adoption will be considered as preferable to care in circumstances where it is possible, because of the true permanency it permits.

- When applicable, Australian adoption arrangements will be open; birth parents will be entitled to safe visitation and updates, and those who choose to place their child for adoption will be involved in the selection of their child's adoptive parents. If possible, sibling groups will be placed together. This could help adoptive children to form a clearer sense of where they come from, their culture, history and background, and should help with forming a sense of self.

- Foster children's rights will be adhered to at all times and will be of equal value to those of biological and adoptive parents, and those of other children. When it is unclear as to whether an adoption should or should not occur, children who are deemed able to make informed decisions should be entitled to have some say as to the parents with whom they live, and the arrangements surrounding this, much as the children of divorce are entitled to nominate their preferred parent after the age of twelve. If a foster child wishes for their foster family to adopt them, but a biological parent refuses to give consent for this, further investigations will be conducted to ensure the child's best interests are met.

- Familial connections that follow children into adulthood will be established. This could help to reduce rates of youth homelessness occurring once children have ‘aged out’ of the child protection system by creating support networks and may also better enable children to complete their education. When adoption has not occurred, foster children will have access to mentorship programs to help them after they have reached maturity.

- Systems will be established to allow foster parents, and adoptive parents before finalisation of the adoption, to make necessary medical decisions on behalf of the children in their care so that medical interventions and treatments can be delivered in a safe and timely manner.

- Promotion and facilitation of the adoption of special needs children will be available at a national level. Prospective adoptive parents will be able to nominate to adopt a special needs child and will have access to information to help them learn about the child’s disabilities and/or needs. In these instances, stability will be acknowledged as particularly important so that health care can be accessed, and consistent parental figures can deliver care.

- Information on adoption and foster care will be clear and readily available for both birth parents and prospective adoptive parents. Systems will be stream-lined and adoptive parents will be able to access information sessions to help them with various concerns such as transracial parenting, addressing trauma, speaking about adoption, special needs, cultural considerations, etc. This way, good parents will not be excluded due to inability

to access systems and will be best equipped to deal with any difficulties they and their child may experience.

- Unless in extreme circumstances, children will keep their first name as given at birth, by way of establishing consistent identity, and maintaining ties to their birth family and culture. If adoptive families wish to give their child a name this will be a middle and surname, but children will be addressed by their birth name and will be encouraged to embrace this, and other parts of their pre-adoption identity.
- Media representations of adoption and foster care will be readily available, positive and accurate. Australian creators will work to reduce stigma by normalising adoption and providing role models for those involved with it. The language used to speak about adoption will be careful and tactful – such terms as “put up” and “offered” will be replaced by “placed” and “available”, and children will be presented as autonomous individuals.

Such an important issue as this one will require the dedication and cooperation of all Australians, but I look forward to the work that we, as a nation, will do to improve local adoption and increase rates in Australia in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Shannon Jade Burns.