

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 22 April 2005 9:40 AM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Submission to Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas
Importance: High

**The Secretary of the Committee
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas
Via e-mail: fhs.reps@aph.gov.au**

PLEASE NOTE WE WOULD LIKE OUR NAMES TO BE SUPPRESSED

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the *Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas*. Having been through the process of international adoption of our daughter we would like to bring the following specific issues to your attention. We know that others will provide far more detail in their submissions, so our contribution is simply focusing on the issues that have had most impact on us as a family.

Terms of reference

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

While we know there are all sorts of inconsistencies that others will address, the issue that we would like to highlight is the fact that at least between the ACT and NSW there is a significant difference in the way police checks are undertaken. Fortunately we were processed in the ACT, so we did not have to face the requirement to be finger printed as part of the police check. We find this practice quite disturbing. One is made to feel like a criminal. Is it really necessary and appropriate? We recognize that it is important to have thorough checks of prospective adoptive parents, but why is it that the Australia Federal Police do not have this requirement and NSW does? We strongly urge the Committee to recommend that there is a consistent approach to this particular issue (i.e. preferably no finger printing) related to police checks.

2. 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.

2a. Given the Government's desire to encourage families to have children and the fact that overseas adoptions carry significant costs, we recommend that Australian Government agencies (e.g. those dealing with adoptions, DIMIA etc) do not charge

for these services and that you recommend similar action be taken by the States and Territories.

2b. The international costs related to an overseas adoption should also be tax deductible as they are in the USA. While this does not address the total costs of adoption for adoptive parents, it would send a positive message from the Government that adopted children are just as valued in our society as those born here and that assistance will be provided to those families that adopt. We urge the Committee to recommend that all overseas expenses (as long as they adequately documented because they are substantial) be allowed as a tax deduction (either individual or split between parents).

2c. We have faced an interesting situation with Medicare (Woden ACT office) regarding our Medicare cards. We submitted our Medicare form for our daughter on return from overseas and were issued with a card for her. On our first visit to Medicare there was much confusion about why our daughter had an individual card and was not on a family card. We explained that both parents had individual cards and that our daughter had recently been adopted. The suggestion was that we should all be included on one card. So, we agreed that we would think about it. On subsequent visits we were asked why this child had not signed the form and our response was that she could not sign her name given she is the child in the stroller! Then at another visit to the above office, we were again advised that we should have a family card. After asking what that meant, we were advised that if we did this there would be a waiting period! I am sure the Committee would understand what our reaction would have been to that! We have not had the energy to deal with Medicare again on this issue. Therefore, one useful recommendation that the Committee could make is to request Medicare to handle overseas (and domestic) adoptees in exactly the same way as birth children are handled and advise new adoptive families accordingly. We are still in the dark regarding this issue.

2d. Given we both work in the Australian Public Service we are disturbed by the inconsistency in the way Certified Agreements deal with leave provisions for adoptive parents. We believe others will provide detailed information on this issue. We urge the Committee to recommend that the Maternity Leave Act be amended to include the significant component of 12 weeks' paid leave be also available in the case of adoptions. Some argue that maternity leave is only for the benefit of the mother to rest before the birth of the child and recover after that period - that is, a medical or physiological view of maternity. We believe that the bonding between mother and child is also a significant issue and that is why many mothers extend their leave well beyond the 12 weeks. All these issues are exactly the same for adoptive mothers. The bonding issues for adoptive children can be acute, and extended (paid) leave in many ways is more needed for adoptive parents than it is for birth parents. There is a substantial literature on bonding and adopted children that bears this out.

It is also important for the Committee to recommend that employers recognize that in some cases fathers become primary carers depending on the family circumstances. Certainly the Australian Public Service could be at the forefront and

show leadership on such an issue. The Government could demonstrate its support for adoption as being equivalent to children being born to families.

2e. Our last issue concerns private Health Insurance Funds. While we were able to include our daughter within our current cover (with no waiting period), we did object to being asked to provide proof of identity. Our response was "does this happen to birth children?" with the answer being "no" because they can deduce the information from the hospital and medical claims associated with a birth. We urge the Committee to recommend to private insurance funds that they have processes to ensure that they do not in any way discriminate against adopted children and that they handle such matters with sensitivity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry and we hope that you will be able to make some innovative recommendations to the Australian Government to assist Australians who are adopting or have adopted children from overseas countries (intercountry placement adoptions). We should end by saying that we are overwhelmingly positive about international adoption. We have the most beautiful child one could ever imagine. She has added richness to our family and we look forward to our future together as a family and her contribution to Australian society. If your deliberations can assist others with this journey that can only be for the good.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ACT [REDACTED]

22 April 2005