

SUBMISSION NO. 155

AUTHORISED: 25-05-05 *[Signature]*

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5th May 2005.

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to reinforce some inconsistencies in the process of adoption and benefits available to adopting parents which I am sure others have already drawn to your attention.

Inconsistencies in Process

Waiting Lists

My wife and I are unable to have a child of our own. Over the last couple of years, we have had several attempts at IVF, but without any success. We live in Queensland and for the last 3, IVF has been our only option for seeking to obtain a child since prior to September last year, the waiting list for Queensland Adoption had been closed for several years.

We were in the ludicrous situation of being on the waiting list for the waiting list. I have friends who moved interstate because of the lengthy delays in the Queensland waiting times and who were allocated children far quicker than if they had have stayed in Queensland. I struggle to understand how some states can have a streamlined system, while other states struggle because of either the demand or lack of resources.

Queensland has again closed their waiting list indefinitely and so other couples like my wife and I will be forced to endure the frustration or move interstate.

Waiting time between allocation of children and travel for Taiwanese adoptions.

I am also concerned with the delays between the time a child is allocated and the date of departure of the couple to pick up the child. Currently for the Taiwan program which my wife and I are applying this is on average 23 weeks.

However, for other countries (namely the Netherlands) adopting from the same orphanage, the time is 4 to 6 weeks shorter. This is a reduction of between a fifth and a quarter which is significant – particularly to the child who needs to develop bonds in a stable environment as quickly as possible.

The main point of concern is the Australian Authorities practice of insisting that the Final Court Decree has been issued and all paperwork has been translated and received by Australian authorities before a visa for the child is granted. The Netherlands allow the adoptive parents to travel to pick up the child based on the Initial Family Court Decree which has been made. They issue a visa based on the fact that the adoptive parents have been approved by the Dutch authorities and permission to adopt has been granted by the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands. The Initial Court Decree is accepted as adequate proof that the birth parents have agreed to relinquish their child and that the Taiwanese authorities have given permission for this process to proceed.

I would like to suggest to this Inquiry that the Australian authorities consider accepting other documentation to verify the child's eligibility to depart from Taiwan legally instead of the Final Court Decree. I believe that the Initial Court Decree and an Affidavit of release for travel from the relinquishing parent should be sufficient as it is to the Dutch authorities.

Inconsistencies in Benefits

Cost of the Adoption Process

Another interesting difference in the adoption process compared to the natural birth process is the process of adoption and its subsequent cost. Adoptive parents are required to undergo an onerous application process complete with numerous forms, assignments, interviews, reports and the like. This is expensive and just the application process costs several thousand dollars. Compared to this, natural birth parents are not required to undertake any courses, any screening or any preparation.

Please do not misunderstand me, I believe the courses and preparation material have been beneficial to myself and my wife overall, but I was frustrated by the fact that we did not have a choice in this matter and were subsequently billed for it. I understand the need for screening, but struggle a bit with the high cost of the application when it is compared to natural births. I find it difficult not to think that infertile couples are being discriminated against.

If the government sees this preparation as essential for adoptive parents and even beneficial for natural parents, perhaps some of these costs should be allowed to be tax deductible.

I don't believe there is any real debate that the cost of adoption is far in excess of the cost of having a baby naturally or even through assisted means such as IVF when you factor in the medicare benefits and private health care refunds. I believe there are many IVF couples benefiting greatly from the Medicare Safety Net. It seems very unfair that adoptive parents do not have any similar benefits to avail themselves of.

I would like to ask the inquiry to consider whether any components of the adoptive process could be made tax deductible to help adoptive parents bare the load.

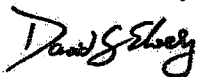
As an example, most adoptive programs have a sizable "compulsory" donation that is required to be given to the orphanage, hospital or adoption agency in the overseas country. This helps fund their work and the care of needy children in their facility. If I were to give this money to UNICEF or World Vision or another recognised charity, it would be tax deductible. Perhaps, this component of the adoption costs could be made tax deductible to help adoptive couples. After all, we are constantly told that adoption is for the benefit of the child who we are adopting – a child in need.

Baby Bonus

The restriction of the Baby bonus to adoptive children under 26 weeks is unfair. Adoptive parents still have the same set up costs as birth parents and these don't magically disappear when the child turns 26 weeks old. The baby bonus should not have an age limit on it for overseas adoptions because any age limit may discriminate against an adopted child.

Thank you for you interest in this topic and the careful thought you will give to finding a solution to this inequities.

Yours Faithfully,



David & Deanna Elvery

