

30th April 2005

To the Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Parliament House
Canberra
Via email

Re: Parliamentary enquiry into intercountry adoptions and how the Australian government can better assist Australian families who are planning to or have adopted from overseas.

Dear Committee Members

My husband and I are in the process of adopting a child from China. During the process it has come to our attention that there are some substantial inequalities which disadvantage adopting parents of children from overseas, as opposed to both birth parents and local adoptions.

Given the benefits to Australia of a growing population already articulated by Ministers within the Federal Government it seems contradictory to penalize and disadvantage people willing and ready to contribute to achieving this aim when this could be avoided through legislation.

In particular I draw your attention to the inequities with regard to the Maternity Payment. Since July 2004 a Maternity payment of \$3000 was allocated to all families producing a child via birth, local adoption or an adoption wherein the child came into a family under the age of 26 weeks.

The requirements of the adoption process which are to be met according to the Chinese government mean that it is totally unlikely that a child under the age of 26 weeks will be allocated to any Australian family. Children from China are not available for adoption under the age of 6 months. Hence there is an automatic disqualification of families pursuing the adoption of a child from China under current Australian legislation.

Even though there has been public discussion recently that the Federal Government is considering raising the age limit of eligibility to receive the Maternity Payment, this will not be a logical nor an equitable solution.

The Maternity Payment is deemed to be to assist families in meeting the financial needs during the circumstances of having a new family member enter a family. Its provision assists families where one parent must leave work for a period (compulsory in Victoria for 12 months). It is also well documented that there is no lessening of a financial burden if a child comes into a family at an older age. Logic would suggest that it is in fact likely to be more costly not less.

Hence I recommend that the Federal Government abolish the age limit for eligibility for Maternity Leave.

After all, the welfare, care and consideration of the child, no matter at what age they form a family, should be the major determining factor of allocating a Maternity Payment.

Given the small number of intercountry adoptions in Australia it is of minimal cost to the Government to abolish the age limit imposed on intercountry adoptions in order to qualify for Maternity Leave. It would give the parents of these children a real sense of support and equity as we pursue our aim of making a family - as we have been encouraged to do by the Federal Government.

Sincerely

Julie Pinkham

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Victoria [REDACTED]