

From: Robert and Anne Sanders [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 26 April 2005 10:21 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Adoptions

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
SA [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

20.4.05

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission re Inter-country Adoption

Dear Sir / Madam

Thank-you for the opportunity to contribute to the Federal Government Standing Committee's enquiry into Inter-country Adoption.

As an adoptive parent and a member of a large adoption support group for the past 25 years I have had the opportunity to hear anecdotes from many adoptive parents and to examine the factors that contribute to the success (or occasionally failures) of inter-country adoptions.

**INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN EXPERIENCES OF BIRTH AND
ADOPTIVE PARENTS**

Many other adoptive parents have commented on the different conditions they face as adoptive as compared to birth parents particularly the growing and often exorbitant costs that prevent many families from even considering adoption. This discrimination seems to go right through all aspects of our society and seems to date back to a time when the child's adoption was veiled in secrecy and his/her origins were not discussed. It is very well documented how negatively this denial of identity has impacted on many adoptees. Happily this secrecy is not even possible with most inter-country adoptions, in SA at least, where children come mainly from Asia or Africa to join parents of Caucasian

background. Adoptive families are still affected by these outdated attitudes and lack of insight which often do not take into account the needs of adopted children and their families.

This shows up in:

ALLOWANCES: The baby bonus of \$3000 is not payable to parents unless the child is placed with them before he/she is under 26 weeks. Practically no inter-country adoptees are placed with their new families before they are this age. The cost for a new child are no less, and often more, the older the child.

PARENTING LEAVE: Often not the same as for birth parents, generally less, even though the child needs just as much care as s/he adjusts to a new environment. Many states' adoption regulations recognise this by requiring at least one parent to give up work for a certain length of time after the child arrives (but does not require this of birth parents).

EDUCATION: How does the adopted child cope when asked to fill out a family tree as part of a study of genetics when the teacher (and the curriculum) does not recognise that some children might not know who their biological ancestors are?

SUPERANNUATION: Insurance provision is made for parents taking leave to take care of a new born child: no mention of similar provision for adoptive parents.

NON APPEARANCE IN MEDIA (SEE BELOW)

Whilst state governments have adoption legislation putting the child's interests first and recognising some of the lessons that 30 years of inter-country adoption has taught us about the needs of adoptees, other legislation, regulations and community attitudes have not kept pace.

Adoptees and adoptive families continue to suffer the discrimination inherent in the failure of legislation, administration and community attitudes to recognise their needs. This goes right through every aspect of our society.

INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN STATE AND TERRITORY APPROVAL PROCESSES.

States charge different amounts to process adoption applications. They also have other variations in legislation and regulations and administrative systems, so much so that families have been known to move interstate in order to fit the requirements of a particular state.

The greatest differences between SA and the other states has been (until 31.3.05) a system involving a licensed adoption agency. Whilst much of the hands on work was done by the agency, the final approval of both the applicants and for the placement of the child were in the hands of the Government's Adoption and Family Information Service. This dual system was generally well accepted although applicants were free to have their applications processed through AFIS only and a few have opted to do so. SA is credited with the highest number of adoptions per head of population of any of the states (not including ACT) and one of the shortest processing times.

Although the South Australian Government announced on 2.2.05 that it had decided not to renew the Licence of the Australians Aiding Children Adoption Agency and effectively closed its doors from 31.3.05 the legacy left by the Agency will live on in the number of happy families and successful adoptions it has assisted.

Media restrictions in SA

Another way in which SA seems to differ from other states is in the legislation relating to the media. The Adoption Act of 1988 provides for a \$20,000 fine for any media concern which publicly identifies a party to an adoption (adoptee, adoptive or relinquishing parent). There does not appear to be similar legislation in other states (unless it is generally ignored) as evidenced by the personal stories of parliamentarians and high profile performers as well as those of other adoptees and adoptive families on radio, television and in the press recently. This SA legislation affectively prevents adoptive parents from speaking out publicly about adoption issues including any concerns they have about the adoption process. It also deters the media from tackling these issues as reporters generally prefer to focus on actual people whose names and images in this case they are not at liberty to reveal. This is a situation that appears to date back to a time when adoptions were kept secret and not openly discussed. It is another instance where adoptive families and their children are discriminated against, which can again add to the adoptees' feeling of non-acceptance in normal society.

Yours sincerely,

MA Sanders (adoptive parent)