



Research Director
Health, Communities, Disability Services and
Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
By email: hcdsdfvpc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Sunday 2nd October 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

Adopt Change would like to thank the Committee and Minister Fentiman for the opportunity to provide a letter of submission regarding the *Adoption and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016*.

As advocates for a child's right to grow up in a permanent, loving and stable family, Adopt Change are keenly interested in developments in legislation that facilitate timely, positive outcomes for children; promote Open Adoption (when adoption is the best option for a child); and harmonise legislation, policy and practice between states and territories.

Adopt Change would encourage continued reform in policy and practise in Queensland to ensure that permanency planning is commenced when a child enters care, and decisions are made in the child's best interests, in a timely manner. We recommend that there be transparency of process and clear and appropriate timeframes set.

The importance of permanency and timeliness is supported by a large body of research showing that children in temporary or institutional care are more vulnerable to self-harm, substance abuse and suicide¹²³ as a result of an increased experience of emotional abuse and physical abuse⁴ and a lack of permanency. People who have had an experience with impermanent care are more likely to experience homelessness⁵, poor education and health (particularly mental health)

¹ Sawyer, M., Carbone, J., Searle, A. and Robinson, P. (2007) 'The mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents in home-based foster care' in *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 186 (4) 181-184.

² See <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/mentalhealth/>

³ See Tarren-Sweeney, M. (2008) 'The Mental Health of Children in Out-of-Home Care', accessed at http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/575410_3

⁴ Australian Institute of Family Studies (2014) 'Effects of child abuse and neglect for children and adolescents', accessed at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/effects-child-abuse-and-neglect-children-and-adolescents>

⁵ Flatau, P., Conroy, E. et. al. (2013) *Lifetime and Intergenerational Experiences of Homelessness in Australia*, AHURI Final Report No. 200, Melbourne

outcomes⁶, and are more likely to be involved with criminal activity⁷. A US research project of 701 adoptees in the US found that better relationships between adoptive parents and adoptees correlated with less chance of truancy, substance abuse, school suspension or contact with the police⁸.

It is widely regarded that permanency and meaningful adult attachment are necessary for a child to experience a normal developmental trajectory, and so disruptions to this often have the adverse effects mentioned above⁹. Therefore, it is imperative to consider permanency options for children who are unable to remain with their birth families at as early a stage as possible¹⁰.

We would like to draw your attention to the increased support services that will be required with the increase in adoption that will follow, in particular, the need for pre- and post-adoption support services, and the capacity building of case-workers and professionals.

Adopt Change looks forward to further reform in adoption and child protection policy and practise in Queensland and nationally, to ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow up in a permanent, stable and loving family.

Please do not hesitate to contact Adopt Change should you wish to discuss our submission further.

Regards,

Renée Carter
Chief Executive Officer
Adopt Change

⁶ McHugh, M. and Pell, A. (2013) *Reforming the Foster Care System in Australia: A New Model of Support, Education and Payment for Foster Parents*, Berry Street and UNSW, accessed at <http://www.berrystreet.org.au/Assets/2583/1/ProfessionalisedFosterCareSystemfullpaper.pdf>

⁷ As above

⁸ Pike, G. (2014) *Adoption Rethink*, Women's Forum Australia

⁹ See Tarren-Sweeney, M. (2015) *Developmental Child Welfare – Protecting the Development of Children Who Are in Need of Care*, webinar available at <http://www.adoptchange.org.au/OnlineandMultimedia>

¹⁰ See webinar by Associate Professor Michael Tarren-Sweeney (2015) 'Developmental Child Welfare – Protecting the Development of Children Who Are in Need of Care', accessed at <http://www.adoptchange.org.au/OnlineandMultimedia>