Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Former Forced Adoption Policies

I write as a clinical psychologist who has provided therapy for mothers many years after they were pressured to give up their children for adoption.

I address the second term of reference about potential roles for the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to prevent the re-occurrence of forced removal of children.

I submit that introducing the recommendations below will reassurance parents that steps taken in the past are less likely to occur again in the future.

Recommendations

1. That the Australian Parliament introduce legislation expressing a rebuttable presumption that it is in the best interests of a child to be raised by the birth mother.

2. That the presumption about the best interests of the child be rebutted only by written evidence by an appropriate professional that addresses parenting capacity of the relevant parent.

3. That the presumption be rebutted only when evidence establishes the opposite on the basis of 'beyond reasonable doubt'

4. That, with assistance from relevant professional bodies, legislation establish issues and criteria to be addressed in an professional assessment of parenting capacity.

5. That professionals who submit reports about parenting capacity be required to make their report available both to affected parties and to any therapist named by an affected party.

6. That a policy be introduced requiring delivery of appropriate therapy to remediate any shortcomings identified in a professional report about parenting capacity, before removal of children from a parent, so that therapy is a method of first resort and removal of a child is a method of last resort unless the life of the child is at risk.

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