Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
P. O. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices

submission

June Smith
(…)

(…)

(…)

Dear Secretary

Please accept my submission.

The toll on mothers' mental state in writing these submissions is immense and should not to be taken lightly.

I wish to utter another mother's words sent to the Committee in a recent E-mail.

I feel personally that the Committee is denying these young single mothers of yesterday any genuine chance to justice or recognition. I would never have known of this Inquiry unless a mother had advised me of its existence. I feel angry that no relevant publicity was offered to all mothers across this country. We have been waiting for decades for genuine and sincere application to our issue with no result to date.

There are many, many mothers across this vast country that were cruelly silenced into never revealing that they had a baby as a single mother.
They were made ashamed, driven to be guilt ridden, derided into silence by illegal, unethical, and inhumane practices meted out by all governments, hospitals, welfare agencies and religious hierarchies.
Many of these women will die never revealing the loss of their baby. They have carried the burden of lies bestowed on them by the perpetrators of crimes against them. Yet you failed to advertise in the media of this impending inquiry. An inquiry that would in part offer some validation to these mothers for the pain, trauma and loss they have endured for many, many years.

Mothers need assurance that this Senate Inquiry will not proceed the way of other Inquiries the Senate has resided over where mothers have submitted their stories. For example - the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care displayed in its final report a successional abuse of these mothers when the Senators acknowledged that we mothers were relevant to that inquiry but flippantly hand-balled our issue back to state governments those who had previously and constantly disregarded our call for recognition

We are no longer young in age. We need legitimate acknowledgement of the loss of our children. We will no longer accept the punishment and injustice for the crimes of others. Please treat us with respect and honesty.

June Smith
(...)

For people to heal, the truth must be revealed…Desmond Tutu

Criteria –

(a) the role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions; and
(b) the potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and children who were subject to forced adoption policies.

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Criterion 1.

(a) the role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions; and

1946

With its new head of power the Commonwealth government was on the path to ever extending intervention in health matters. Fundamental change resulted to the federal role in health and social welfare, and led to introduction of hospital and pharmaceutical benefits schemes and public health campaigns.
The constitutional amendment empowered the Commonwealth, with its virtual monopoly of taxing powers, to provide financial assistance for health and other welfare purposes, but only through agreements negotiated with the states.
Agreements with the states over the following years enabled the Commonwealth not only to provide cash to hospitals but to effectively impose conditions.

1948

The National Health Service Act empowered the Commonwealth to take over, provide or arrange for virtually any health facility or service.
This Act was Labor's retaliation over the BMA in Australia's refusal to enter a negotiated agreement. The Labor government did not implement it, but the Menzies Liberal government did.
The 1948 Act was the Labor's response to ongoing opposition by the BMA to anything they suspected led to a nationalised medical service.
The Act empowered the Commonwealth to provide or arrange for general medical or practitioner services, consultant and specialist services, ophthalmic services, maternal and child welfare services, aerial medical and dental services, diagnostic and therapeutic services, convalescent, after-care and nursing services and medical and dental services in schools, colleges and universities.
It also enabled the Commonwealth to take over or establish maintain and manage hospitals and other health facilities and services.

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During the 1950s to the 1970s The Australian Government together with all state governments failed to provide unmarried mothers with equal treatment to that of a married mother in Australian public hospitals.

Unmarried mothers were deliberately denied equal rights to birthing, feeding, holding and raising their new born babies because of their marital status.

The blatant abuse of power, the disregard for statutory law and dereliction of their duty by the workers in hospitals and adoption agencies of the Australian and State Governments culminated in the forced separation and trauma, for life, of a mother and her baby.

These abhorrent practices evolved into an unmonitored, rampant and accepted systematic abuse of young powerless single mothers across Australia that was to last for decades.

Mothers were treated, in most cases, with no respect or empathy for their impending motherhood by doctors, nurses, almoners - later social workers in all public hospitals.
Mothers were usually, if not always treated as being a surrogate mother for another's parenthood.

The Australian government's treatment of single mothers, in collusion with all state governments, during the 1950s to 1970s was contumely, one of culpable neglect, abject indifference, and an acceptance of illegal behavior by their staff towards mothers as punishment for them being unmarried.

Examples of illegal behavior – the hostile removal of new born babies by hospital staff from unmarried mothers -
Abduction – kidnapping – breach of statutory law -

The bullying by hospital staff and welfare workers in adoption in order to obtain signatures from unmarried mothers on consent to adoption forms -
Duress –breached statutory law.

The contemptuous and degrading treatment, physical, mental and verbal, to unmarried mothers by hospital doctors, nurses, and adoption welfare workers -
Unethical, cruel and breached their fiduciary duties.

Mothers were fed stilbesterol (a carcinogenic) or had their breasts tightly bound to prevent lactation although no consent to adoption had been signed –
Intention to abduct baby - an abuse of power by hospital staff - unethical practice - an unbelievable denial of a baby's right to nourishment – breach of fiduciary duty – physical assault – breach of both mother's and babe's right to maternal care when compared with that of a married mother and her babe.

Mothers were prevented from seeing their babies at birth – many hospitals practiced holding sheets up in front of mother's faces to prevent their seeing their baby's first breathe.

A television station filmed the details surrounding a single mother during birthing in the 1960s, she was shown to be held down by chains and straps to the hospital bed to prevent her sitting up and seeing her baby, I have a copy of this tape.

Nurses whisked away babies of single mothers to prevent any eye contact before the expulsion of the placenta. All these actions were carried out even though no consent to adoption had been signed
Illegal abduction, – unethical practice, – assault, – dereliction of duty.

Mothers were told they could see their baby once they had signed consent to adoption –
Blackmail – duress, breached statutory law – abuse of power.

Many mothers were told their babies had died and were requested to sign death certificates which in fact were consent to adoption papers –
Fraud – breached statutory law – dereliction of duty – intention to abduct – breach of duty of care.

An obstetrician (...) of the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne is on record in the Medical Journal of Australia in 1960 as saying - "That the last thing that the obstetrician might concern himself with is the law in regard to adoption."
He also stated in this Journal - "A good environment will make a better job of bad genes," when referring to single motherhood and the joy that adoption brings to the adoptive parents.

For further reference to (...) consideration of women this statement too was published in the same Medical Journal of 1960.

"In the Melbourne *Herald* each night you will see listed the names of people who have been granted divorce and the reasons for the divorce – desertion, cruelty, misconduct, etc. The learned judges have not yet been told about post-partum hemorrhage, which produces an anaemic, tired, irritable mother who is always complaining, driving father to drink and desertion or to solace in somebody else's arms. They could justifiably add it to their list."

This was the attitude of those in government hospitals and adoption welfare agencies who were there supposedly to protect us young mothers, instead they abused us. They are the ones, over the years, who have **falsely informed the legislatures and society** that we did not want our babies.

It is these people who then condemned us to society as "relinquishing mothers" and "birth mothers."
Both these terms are used by those in adoption to alleviate any guilt in others and heartlessly paint a false picture to society of lowly single mothers who didn't want their own babies.

Medical and nursing staff together with welfare workers in adoption agencies by their demeanor, their words, and their actions, in order to obtain consents to adoption, induced shame, guilt, worthlessness, and total despair to these young mothers who were vulnerable and often unsupported, leaving them isolated from help, comfort and their babies. –
I**nhuman and brutal treatment – duress, breached statutory law - dereliction of duty**

Mother's hospital papers were marked **'BFA' = baby for adoption, or 'A' = adoption** informing staff of our married status and the treatment we should encounter.
Premeditated intention of abduction/kidnapping – breach of the Crimes Act – breach of fiduciary duty – an abuse of power

Associated welfare workers in adoption denied mothers information to enable them to raise their babies e.g., availability of financial assistance, both federal or state (not Victoria), public housing, crèche care etc.
Dereliction of duty – abuse of power

These welfare workers in adoption were also seeking babies for the infertile married couples they had bonded with.
Their conflict of interest when dealing with unmarried mothers gave them the opportunity to bring about their own ideals into their own reality.
They denied unmarried mothers their right to care for their babies choosing instead to obtain a new born baby for "their" infertile married couple –
Breached their fiduciary duty - conflict of interest – duress, breaching statutory law.- dereliction of duty

Early 1960s

The introduction of the National Adoption Bill

All state governments together with the federal government met in Canberra to discuss The National Adoption Bill. Again the Federal Government and state governments chose to ignore the ever increasing rate of adoption of single mothers' babies and did **nothing** to prevent its continuance.
Abuse of power – abject treatment of single mothers

Not only did all Australian governments fail to protect vulnerable mothers from the heinous acts that they suffered, but the treatment of them became more, if possible, aggressive.

The escalation in the number of abductions of babies born to unmarried mothers continued to increase in larger and larger numbers each year throughout the 1960s into the 1970s -
Contempt for unmarried mothers – disregard for their and their baby's welfare. - Adoption earnestly promoted by governments to deny financial assistance to unmarried mothers and solved the demand of innumerable infertile couples wanting new born babies to pass off as their own, even though there were tens of thousands of young children in institutions and orphanages needing homes.

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1946

National referendum instigated by the Labor government successfully sought power to legislate on social welfare matters. Paragraph XXIIIa was added to Section 51 of the Constitution empowering the Commonwealth Parliament to make laws with respect to: The provision of maternity allowances, widows pensions, child endowment, unemployment, pharmaceutical, sickness and hospital benefits, medical and dental services (but not so as to authorise any form of civil conscription) benefits to students and family allowances.

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In 1947 the Unemployment and Sickness Benefit Act was passed into law. This Act included a payment of Special Benefit. Special Benefit was to be paid to those Australians in hardship who could not earn a sufficient livelihood for themselves and their dependants.
The Federal government denied single mothers this payment.

The Federal government's "Instructions for the Guidance of Officers" 1951, distributed to officers of Social Services, (I have a copy) gave an example of payment of Special Benefit –
"A young woman required to stay at home and care for invalid parents could be paid Special Benefit."
Yet a single mother staying at home to care for her new born baby was not given the same right to this payment –
D**iscrimination – a determination by federal government to prevent single mothers from raising their children and to protect government coffers.**

This same Guide to Special Benefit, administered by the Federal Government, also declared that if a single mother applied for Sickness benefit when her baby was sick was to be asked if she could find someone to look after her baby whilst she stayed at work –
Unjust practices – deliberate prejudice by the Australian Government

It is worth noting the Director-General of the Department of Social Services F. H. Rowe in 1945 noted in the rules for the guidance of Officers concerned with the grant of Special Benefit.
"All officers concerned in the administration of this legislation are required to exercise courtesy and tact in their dealing with the public and it is desired that each claim shall receive sympathetic consideration."

According to the legal criteria, under the Social Services Act for payment of Special Benefit, single mothers would have been eligible for payment, though not one mother received this payment until two years prior to the introduction to the Single Mothers Benefit when payment was finally made to them.
Although the criteria for Special Benefit had not changed in any way since 1947!

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Criterion 2

(b) the potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and children who were subject to forced adoption policies..

The very first step is to acknowledge publicly the crimes meted out to these young vulnerable mothers of yesterday. The apology needs to come from the Prime Minister and all Premiers of state governments. It needs to be broadcasted in the media to establish that the apology is not to be taken lightly by society.

There has never been any larger group of abused women in Australia's history. These mothers have remained for too long a part of our country's hidden past.

It is very easy for those in power to abuse the vulnerable, the unsupported, and the frightened. It is apparently not so easy to genuinely atone for that abuse.

We are the mothers who have for many decades been ostracized as the mothers who willing gave away their own new born babies. We have had to face and live with the guilt and shame of labels such as birth mother and relinquishing mother when we were neither

We have been scorned and often rejected by our now adult children as terrible mothers, not worthy of any consideration because in their eyes we were responsible for "giving" them away. This destroys our very souls, for our babies were taken against our will from our wombs, our breasts and our arms. We were bullied, abused and defeated. We were young, alone, unsupported, vulnerable and destroyed. No one cared. Please read that again! **No one cared!**

It is us that have had to bear the burden of contempt, of guilt, of shame, the loss of our child's love, though we never lost our love for our child. We have been denigrated and much maligned over the years as the mothers who willingly gave away their own flesh and blood without a care. Many mothers were made too ashamed to ever speak or even whisper of how they were treated and how they lost their babies, or even that they had a child. They still to this day are silenced

Many mothers whose children were cruelly taken were brainwashed into believing they gave away their own new born baby! They still, after many decades live in silence with the guilt and shame that was forced upon them. **The guilt and shame is not theirs to bear.** These young girls had their babies forcibly removed from them. Their pain will last till death.

We are now in our later years, many of us grandmothers between mid 50 and 80 years old. Many mothers went to their graves never knowing or seeing their babies again. Some mothers committed suicide. The incredible injustice we have all suffered cannot be understood except by the mothers themselves who were abused.

There needs to be programs put in place to allow these women to grieve openly. Governments, welfare agencies in adoption and society must face the part they all played in destroying so much of these women's lives.

Their children need to know the truth of their separation for any healing of mothers.

The words "It was a different time" "It was the mores of the time" "We only had good intentions," "there was no pension" – "society demanded it" etc. need to be eradicated from speech when referring to these mothers, especially by those in adoption practices of today.
We mothers suffered the abuse of these so-called "well intended" persons and believe us they were not! We were subjected to a cruel adoption system that wanted our babies at any cost to their mothers. **We were there! We lived it!**

Training needs to be put in place for counsellors to be able to offer us healing. We do not want welfare workers in adoption trying to counsel us as they are still biased towards adoption and are responsible for the continuing promotion of adoption in all its veneer of lies.

All vetoes established by state governments regarding adoption reunions need to be abolished. There are laws in our country that prevent harassment of those not wanting contact with relatives.

All relevant medical records, social work records etc. must be released from hospitals, welfare agencies etc., to mothers, especially in Victoria where no mother can obtain any medical records pertinent to the birth of their child as single mothers, but can however get all medical information for their subsequent children!

All counseling for mothers should be at no cost to them, this includes travelling etc.

I have been part of a group of mothers for more than decade looking for recognition of the cruel taking of my first born son. I have always been against compensation of any kind. I no longer think this way.

I have watched first hand mothers relating their stories at meetings or conferences etc. they have wept and wept, some unable to stand without support. The pain, the loss, the despair and the relived trauma are palpable. Many mothers never had another child.

These mothers faced criminal behavior, contempt, abuse - mental, physical and verbal. Their lives have been lived differently to other mothers who have lost their children to death.
These mothers of yesterday have been made to live in a world where others have raised their first born taken against their will.

They have had to endure their absence from the lives of their babies growing up somewhere in the world without them. Mothers have suffered not knowing the time of milestones in their babies' lives. When they had their first tooth, took their first step, uttered their first word, or the day their child started school and then high school. Not being there to see them achieve the things that bring so much joy to mothers.

Wondering if their child was alive or not. Looking into faces of passer-bys; hoping to see a resemblance to their family. They remember in tears and despair especially on birthdays, mother's day, Christmas day, the birth of a grandchild. They can cry almost any day when a smell, a tune, a word, a name, a thought enters their world and they become destroyed again transported back to that hostile time**. They have had enough punishment!**

These women are owed compensation as any other person who has faced injustice under criminal acts.
These women are owed compensation for the illegal abduction/kidnapping of their babies and the abuse and trauma they suffered at the hands of those who were supposed to care for them.

A precedent needs to be set so that this heinous episode bordering on genocide (the taking of one group of people and giving them to another group), will never again happen in this country's history.

An alternative could be a life pension paid to these women, income and asset free, to denote to all Australians the abuse and criminal behavior these mothers suffered at the hands of all governments and their adoption workers.

Although our Aboriginal people cruelly had their babies and children forced from them it was enacted under nefarious Federal policy.
We mothers had our babies forcibly removed by the enactment of criminal behavior, unethical practices, dereliction of duty, breach of fiduciary care and obscene prejudice.

For myself I present to you that for almost 50 years I have been forced to live with the fact that my son, my beautiful son, was pulled from my arms because I did not want him adopted. My son believes I willing gave him away because this is what is written on his documents. I cannot let him know these words are untrue because I am not allowed by law to know of him. I have lived with this injustice for decades. I have heard the lies, the deceitful lies that have been uttered by adoption workers against single mothers, and I think why, why oh God why are they allowed to treat us so badly.

My son was baptized around two weeks after he was born. He was baptized in the name of the prospective adoptive parents while I was still his guardian by law. Thirty days is required by law for consent to adoption to become binding. The adoption system encompassed so many organizations. The church hierarchies also need to apologize for their role in the removal of babies from their young mums.

I love all my children and the three I have raised I know love me, I have always been and am still a good mum. My grandchildren love me deeply, this I know. Even the youngest grandchild cannot understand that anyone would take my baby. My first born lost a loving mother and his mother her beautiful son. My children lost a brother, he lost brothers and sisters and so many, many more relatives.

I lived for nearly four decades without telling anyone of my first born, not even my parents, my father died never knowing of his grandson, my siblings were not told, no one.

I was condemned into silence for decades by the words and deeds of hospital staff at the Royal Women's Hospital Melbourne, I was told in no uncertain terms that I was worthless, that I had disgraced myself to society by being a single mother. I was told my baby would be better off without me. I was told that if I loved my son I would sign consent to adoption and not be selfish and want him to stay with me. I was given drugs. I was treated with contempt by nursing staff. I was never treated with the dignity that was my right as my son's mother. They succeeded in shaming me and denying me of my baby. I will never forgive any of them. Never!

It is time for justice and recognition.

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