



Contact Statements: Time for them to go!

Dear Members,

We would like to bring your attention to a Bill which is being debated in the upper house of the Victorian Parliament so that you can provide your support if you so wish. The deadline for feedback is **Monday 22nd June.**

Following the Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices in October 2012, the Adoption Amendment Act 2013 put in place long awaited legal provision for natural parents to be able to apply for identifying information regarding their son or daughter who was adopted. While the purpose of this legislation was to provide natural parents with the same rights as adopted persons, the previous government included clauses for the use of contact statements, making it an offence for natural parents to breach these, involving penalties of over \$8,600.

VANISH has actively sought a repeal of these provisions for the following reasons:-

- 1) Mothers and fathers who were separated from their children by adoption (including forced adoptions) regard these rules to be cruel, punitive and based upon the assumption that they would behave like criminals, which directly contradicts and undermines the intent of the Apology.
- 2) A consequence of this legislation has been that it has deterred mothers and fathers from seeking information about their son or daughter.
- 3) The Adoption Act 1984 enshrined the rights of adopted children and natural parents to information about and contact with each other. This right should apply to the adults party to adoptions prior to 1984 to ensure equity to avoid further stigmatisation and traumatisation.
- 4) In some cases adopted persons have been misinformed regarding their natural parents' circumstances, and have been deterred from outreach or from receiving contact.
- 5) Through 25 years of experience of providing post-adoption support, VANISH has found that when individuals are advised that this contact is not desired by the other party, they generally respect those wishes.
- 6) If an individual were to not respect the wishes of the relative they have been separated from, and make unwelcome contact, there are adequate effective legal procedures in place to deal with them without having to impose additional penalties.

It is important that the Victorian Government provides equal treatment for adopted persons and natural parents and that contact between individuals separated by past adoptions is not discouraged by punitive legal measures.

VANISH supports The Hon Jenny Mikakos, Minister for Families and Children in her bid to repeal the parts of the Act that relate to contact statements and penalties.

Please show your support to Minister Mikakos, by writing to her at jenny.mikakos@parliament.vic.gov.au

Please urge Members of the Legislative Council who will be debating this repeal by telephoning, emailing or writing to them. You can find their contact details here:

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/members/house/mlc>

or to email them all please cut and paste the following recipients into your email message.

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If you can provide your personal reasons for why you believe this Act is important, please provide these in your message.

You can read the Victorian Apology here

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/documents/assembly/Apology.pdf>

Many thanks for your support

Coleen Clare
Manager, VANISH
17th June 2015