

Move to overhaul state's adoption laws

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Victoria's adoption laws face the biggest shake-up in 30 years amid concern that the legislation is outdated and doesn't focus enough on the "modern family" .

One week after Victoria became the latest state to allow same-sex couples to adopt, the Andrews government has initiated a sweeping review of the Adoption Act, which could lead to a raft of changes such as greater flexibility for single people or improvements to the way a child's identity is reflected in birth certificates .

Families Minister Jenny Mikakos has asked the Law Reform Commission to examine the act, paving the way for the first comprehensive overhaul of the legislation in three decades.

The review would consider how best to ensure adoption laws align with other pieces of state legislation , promote the best interests of children, and better reflect a "contemporary understanding" of what it is to be a family, she said.

" This is about bringing our adoption laws into the 21st century and making sure our adoptions laws, process and practices reflect the complexity of modern families and address the best interests of children," Ms Mikakos said.

The Adoption Act was written in 1984 and the decision to modernise it comes after a number of other related amendments this year.

The first was in June, when the government repealed contentious Coalition laws giving adopted adult children the right to issue a contact veto against their natural parents and make it an offence for anyone who breached such an order.

The second reform took place this month, when Parliament passed laws giving same-sex couples in Victoria the right to adopt, bringing the state into line with NSW, Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT.

Ms Mikakos said the Law Reform Commission would have until February 2017 to report back to the government, with the community invited to make submissions over coming months.

Issues that the commission could end up examining include integrated birth certificates , which allow people to record details of both their natural and adoptive parents; the fact that single people can adopt only in exceptional circumstances ; and the outdated language used in the act (for instance, it includes references such as "full blood" and "half blood" .)

The commission will not, however, consider inter-country adoption programs or commercial surrogacy, which the government believes is more appropriate for federal authorities to examine.

Opposition families spokeswoman Georgie Crozier said: “ The Coalition took a lot of steps to enhance the ability of children to have permanency in loving, stable environments and what was in the best interests of the child, and awaits with interest the Law Reform Commission review.”

The review comes as latest national figures show adoption rates in Australia have hit a record low.

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