

Legislation Committee

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 3 May 2019 12:39 PM
To: Legislation Committee
Subject: Legislative Council - Human Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Dear Legislation Committee

I've lived what I would call "standard life" in Western Australia, raised by my Mother and Father with my Younger Sister and Brother. I grew up always thinking one day I'll be a Dad. I always liked the idea of adoption, the thought of making another life better rather than creating new life was something that sat very highly for me. Then in my late teen years I realised my feelings were a little different to others and after some investigation I realised I was Gay. Being Gay and being a Dad seemed to be two things that didn't go hand in hand and I often wondered if being Dad would ever be on the cards for me.

I looked into Fostering with my first partner in my late 20's, but he was not interested in pursuing being a Dad so I gave up on that and continued my life thinking I might never be a Dad. When eventually 10 or so years later we broke up and I met my current partner, I once again thought about Fostering/Adopting. My current Partner, Brendon, liked the idea too and we decided to wait a few years to make sure we had a stable relationship etc to avoid jumping into that kind of commitment too soon. Both of us are very responsible people and knew that starting a family would be a huge commitment.

Eventually we came to realise we really wanted to be Dads. We looked into Adoption as we really wanted to start our own Family, it seemed to be an option until we found out there are very few adoptions in WA each year and we would likely never be able to. We then looked into Overseas Adoption and being a Same Sex Couple we were automatically not eligible to do this, quite a kick in the guts. We found 1000's of children needing Adoption on websites in USA but no link to Australia for adopting them, I remember having quite a teary night wondering why Governments would allow these kids to go on waiting for adoption when the same Agencies were helping parents adopt babies from overseas and why wouldn't there be a link between Australia and the USA when our Countries have a close relationship and similar lifestyles, don't these kids deserve loving parents and a stable home?

So Fostering seemed to be our only option, we knew Surrogacy in WA was not allowed for Gay Male Couples, even though our Lesbian counterparts and Single Woman can get pregnant for \$3000 from the sperm bank. We also felt Surrogacy Overseas was out of reach financially, even though we knew people who had done it. We started the Fostering process but soon came to realise the system is very flawed. The children are often bounced between Foster Care and their Biological "Parents" and I use the word "Parent" very loosely here as many of them don't deserve that title, they were just baby making machines with no care for the children they were making. The whole thing seemed heartbreaking and we knew our hearts couldn't take a child being put in our care and then taken away from us to be put back in an often dangerous and unloving environment.

Soon after we found an association called AFS which allowed us to Host a Teenage Student from overseas to attend High School here in Australia for 11 months on exchange and our first Son arrived in 2015. We loved the experience of being Dads and had the most awesome year. We became very close to our Student, his Sister and Parents and in 2017 they all came to visit us. This only made us more determined to be Dads, the love, friendship and bond we felt with our first and future students we hosted proved to us the great Dads we could be. When each of them left we felt like a part of us was ripped away, we knew this proved that Fostering wasn't going to be for us.

So being determined now to be Dads we attended a Surrogacy Seminar and found that maybe we could afford overseas Surrogacy after all and started the process in Canada. Our Baby boy was born in July 2017 in Canada thanks to two beautiful Canadian Woman who were our Egg Donor and Surrogate. The whole process is very similar to what it is here in Australia only much fairer and more organised. We would now like to do it all again in Canada

but we aren't sure we can cover it financially. With having to fly over there and living there for up to 6/7 weeks it gets very expensive. Money that would be much better spent here in our own Country instead of overseas.

Being so far from our Surrogate was difficult, we had a great Agency looking after her in Canada, but to not be able to just go and help with the house work or take her Children out for a movie or to the park to give her a break was disappointing. Her, her Husband and Children are like family to us now, only we can only see them through the internet because they are so far away we do plan future visits but it's all so expensive with Australia so far away.

Our Son is now 21 months old and doing very well with his two Dads, we are finding that the general public, relatives and friends are all very accepting of us and we are amazed how much support we have. It's been said by the Hon Nick Goiran that a child needs Mother, so they don't need a Father (or two)? I think this way of thinking is rather archaic, it really stems from the thought that a Woman's place is in the home doing the housework, cooking dinner and tending to the children. Men went to work and Woman kept house and were the nurturers. It's not like that anymore. Some Woman have some awesome careers while their husbands stay at home nurturing the kids. Men can do the same job at nurturing as a Woman when they aren't being told by society that they can't! I'm more Motherly and Nurturing than some of the Woman I know and I'm very much a Man. After all, we're all equal right?

Well no, we aren't because the current Act states that Single Men and Gay Men can't access Surrogacy when Single Woman and Lesbian Woman can have all the babies they want with either free donated sperm or \$3000 for some from the Sperm Donation Clinic. How is this fair? How is this equal?

People will claim stats of mental anguish and poor mental health in reference to Adopted Children who are now Adults etc, but those times were filled with lies and secrets. It's the lies and secrets that really caused the damaged. Friends of mine who were adopted but knew all, along have very stable, normal lives. It's the ones that were lied to, that have the mental issues, it's got little to do with where their genetics come from, it's the lies they were told and the secrets that were kept that created that doubt and longing for answers in my opinion.

We have a framed picture on the wall in our Nursery "The Village That Made a Baby" and in that picture is myself, my partner and our baby boy only a few weeks old. To our right is our Surrogate, her Husband and 3 kids and to our left, our Egg Donor, her Parents and Sister. That is the Village that created our beautiful baby boy. He will ALWAYS know where he came from, he will always have contact with everybody involved and most of all he will always have the love and support of his two doting Dads. Not only that, he has his Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins and our huge group of friends and their kids. His life will be full of love and support from so many and he will never doubt his worth or where he belongs, he'll live a very good life and want for nothing.

I'm not sure how you could ever turn this around to say that it's unfair on him, isn't it unfair on the children who's parents are druggies and criminals who don't care for them, who constantly spit out babies to get bigger payments from the Government. Aren't they the kids you should really be spending your time debating about and fixing our Child Protection services to save their lives sooner so they are less damaged when they find their forever foster family? They are the damaged kids the ones with no hope and no future.

I ask you to really consider what a parents' role is in this day and age, the old roles of Men and Women are no more. A child can live a healthy, loving life with the support of two loving parents of the Same Sex just as much as they can with a Mother and a Father. And then to extend that, many parents today have to do it alone and do a fantastic job, I'd hate to do it alone, I think being a parent is the hardest job in the world, the most rewarding, but the hardest and I applaud those that do it alone for their efforts. Like they say though, "it takes a village to raise child" it's not just the parent/s who raise a child and in Surrogacy it also takes a village to create one.

I ask you to please allow future Gay Men and Single Men the fairness of accessing IVF and Surrogacy in Western Australia as our other Countrymen are able to already do in other States. Yes it's about the fulfilment of the Adults to want to be parents, like most other Adults long for and do, but it's not the detriment of the children as others will have you believe. The people you will be enabling to have children will do a better job than many others who can naturally create a child, because they have to go through a lot to have the child in the first place. It's not just a case of having one night of sex, there are many processes and things they must fulfil to be able to be a parent which shows their commitment.

Thank you for your time reading my story, I hope that other Men in WA can fulfil their dreams of being a Dad here in WA rather than going abroad like we were forced to do, it's a huge financial and emotional burden to be forced to a foreign country to build your family, we were just so thankful that Canada is so similar to Australia in many ways and the people are even more friendly and accepting than Australians.

Sincerely



Michael Thomas