



Crown Ward logo
by Linda Prosh

Submission to the Social Policy Committee Bill 183: Adoption Information Disclosure Act, 2005

**Submitted to: Committee Clerk – Anne Stokes
Via Email: anne_stokes@ontla.ola.org
Date: Tuesday May 17th 2005
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My name is John Dunn, Executive Director of The Foster Care Council of Canada, a nonprofit organization located in Ottawa which seeks to improve the experience of child welfare services for its clients through public education, advocacy and support services.

I have read articles in various newspapers from individuals who support Bill 183 as well as from others who do not support the bill. There have been comments made to the Privacy Commissioner from birth mothers claiming they would commit suicide if this legislation is passed.

I am deeply moved to hear such comments from anyone and hope these individuals would take steps required to get support and assistance they need to deal with the possibility of someone contacting them in order to have a chance to meet their natural parent and/or find out where they came from after a life time of searching.

I would even urge those individuals to make the no contact veto, which the bill enables them to do, and to offer an explanation to the seeker as to why they do not wish to have contact. The seeker would more than likely understand that under such circumstances, it would be difficult to deal with and both parties would more than likely be satisfied.

The reason I am writing this letter is to offer my support for Bill 183 as it stands, with its retroactivity. I feel it is important to include and maintain the retroactivity of Bill 183 since there are literally thousands of mothers out there who have given up their children for adoption, against their true will. It would also defeat the incredible work done by advocates both in the Legislative Assembly and out since all of their work would only benefit people from today forward.

We often hear the words “gave up their child for adoption”. For many, they did not “give up their child” as a simple decision. This decision often was made as a result of extreme pressure from family, church, or child welfare officials who did not offer them support during a most difficult time in their lives.

Some decisions were made due to religious beliefs and pressures, social pressures, and many other factors. But suffice it to say, if they were offered support and kindness rather than negative feedback and stigma many would have gladly kept their baby and maintained a relationship with them.

We have to remember when we hear the words “gave up their baby for adoption” that some children were not “given up” but rather were taken by child welfare authorities against the parents will for many reasons of which do not often include abuse.

Children have been put up for adoption by child protection agencies as a result of a mother seeking temporary assistance from them. Remember, with the legislation as it is, if a baby is less than six years of age, just twelve months of involvement with a CAS can mean automatic Crown Wardship for the purpose of adoption. This “involvement” is cumulative. For example, if a child is in care for three months while mom is seeking temporary assistance, and then things work out, the child is returned and life goes on... then during another crisis, she seeks help again, this time is added to the previous time, even if it was years later.



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A common practice of Children's Aid Societies is to make six month custody and control orders known as Society Wardships when an agreement or apprehension is initiated. In effect this means that a mother only has one chance to request assistance from a CAS in her baby's first six years of life without putting the relationship between herself and her child at risk of termination for the purpose of adoption.

Remember, children are taken into care for other reasons than abuse such as "neglect" or "abandonment", both words which sound horrible to most. What exactly is abandonment and or neglect?

As most of you are recently aware, due to press coverage of the legal battle between the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and parents across the province who have children with severe disabilities, parents are labeled as "abandoning" their children because they applied for assistance to help the children they love. As you can see, a label can be very misleading.

The label does not accurately describe the various reasons the child is in care. As is the case with the label "neglect" which is given to many parents who need temporary assistance or support, rather than litigious process and social humiliation of needing "child protection services".

Disabled parents have had their kids taken because they can not clean their apartments or can't maintain a neat apartment.

Parents seeking employment who can not afford daycare ask for assistance... sometimes more than once...

Parents who are victims of violence are again victimized by having their children taken away, and again each birthday, holiday and every night while going to bed, wishing they could hold and kiss their child to sleep.

Please remember this huge population of child welfare clients who have lost their children due to legislative prose, burnt out social workers, and lack of community supports when considering the retroactivity of Bill 183. Also remember that I myself, a former Ward of the Children's Aid Society of sixteen years, who at the age of ten, met my mother, sisters, nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts and uncles.

Sincerely,

John Dunn



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