

3/3/18

To whom it may concern,

Re: Submission in relation to the Independent review of the Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991 and Surrogacy Act 2008

As someone that has not only personally gone through and continues to go through the anguish of IVF but has a cousin and two close friends that are yet to come out the other side, I feel that I have the experience to provide comment on the reform of the above mentioned Acts.

My journey starts with meeting the love of my life and deciding that as two women we would never have children. It wasn't until two years into our relationship that our family and friends questioned us on our decision and debunked every theory we had come up with of why we shouldn't. We did not take the decision lightly and it took another two years before we finally came to the conclusion that we thought we might make OK parents. After all, all a child needs is love and care and we certainly had plenty of that to give.

We started our IVF journey expecting to have a baby in our arms in less than a year, turns out it took more than twice that long. A timeframe I have come to learn is actually a quick outcome compared to others. As it so happened I was diagnosed with Grade 4 endometriosis rendering me unable to conceive without IVF/ICSI after two surgeries saw the removal of one of my fallopian tubes and one ovary due to severe adhesions. I had one round of ICSI and four embryo transfers resulting in two unsuccessful transfers, an ectopic pregnancy leading to further surgery with the removal of my second fallopian tube and then finally a successful transfer resulting in a beautiful baby girl.

The emotion struggle prior to our last transfer of me potentially never conceiving was made easier knowing my partner was also a woman and she would be able to carry for me in the case I was unable. We used to joke in the awkwardness of others receiving our bad news after each failed transfer - 'Don't worry about us we are the lucky ones as we have two wombs to try'. We have come to understand that this statement is far from a joke and in fact exactly what some couples would give anything to have.

We were incredibly lucky, it is not this quick for most people, not by a long shot but my short 15 month journey from GP appointment to a positive pregnancy test was hard. Multiple blood tests and doctors appointments, injections and pessaries, painful surgeries, dashed hopes one after the other, the continual waiting, the financial burden, all while trying to balance full time work between appointments and ultimately putting our lives completely on hold took its toll. My partner and I argued, we cried, we said no to holidays and weekends away because we didn't know when the next blood test or appointment would be and because all our savings went toward IVF. We became bitter watching other people around us fall pregnant on the first go. We became negative people and that's not who we were. Having to go through IVF is a physical, emotional and financial struggle.

We are now over a year into our second IVF journey with my partner taking the reigns this time. Despite having no fertility issues so far the last year has seen two failed IUIs, 1 failed ICSI cycle with two failed PGD tested embryos, a second ICSI cycle with the first transferred embryo ending in miscarriage at 11 weeks. We have two more embryos left to try.

We have been on the IVF rollercoaster now cumulatively for almost three years but have been lucky enough to conceive. I can not imagine what it is like to have to do this for four or five or six years without any children at the end which is the case for two of the couples we know.

I have seen my cousin and her husband and my friends separately suffer through countless failed ICSI cycles, failed embryo transfers, failed implantations, negative pregnancy tests and countless miscarriages leading to both these couples having to explore surrogacy.

What a minefield surrogacy in Australia is and what makes it more difficult is that each state has different laws. It's not until you have conversations with people who are actually faced with the prospect of having no other option but to go down that route that you realise the legal battlefield, the cost, the difficulty in accessing a surrogate and the excessive timeframe to achieve a potential pregnancy.

As a couple that relied on the goodness of an anonymous donor to provide his sperm for us through a registered donor program via our IVF clinic we more than most people understand the enormous selfless gift this person gave to us. Without this person we would not be where we are today. I truly believe that there are many people out there that would love to help a couple, myself included, achieve parenthood but rendering their help is made so difficult by government bureaucracy. My cousin and my friends as well as many other couples have been through enough already without having to be faced with misguided and ill informed law makers laying out the red tape. It is just not fair that a surrogacy program in the Ukraine with costs in excess of \$100,000 is a more achievable option than one in our own country.

I also have a gay younger brother and I hope that one day if he decides he would like a family of his own that he is supported in that right by our government without the discrimination and difficulties that currently exist.

My recommendations include:

- Change the policies to encourage and support more surrogates to volunteer for this journey. Simplify the process while still upholding legal and ethical guidelines.
- The government to challenge public understanding by conducting an appropriate public awareness campaign to combat the community's misconception that altruistic surrogacy is illegal. Surrogacy should be supported and celebrated.
- Government to put in place more comprehensive arrangements to support surrogates, inclusive of income support, life insurances and legal protections.
- Equal parenting rights and surrogacy access for males both single men and those in same sex relationships. This includes having only the intended parent/s names on their child's birth certificate.

I would be happy to be contacted to provide further detail if appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Jenna Farthing

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