

THE ADOPTION COUNCIL OF CANADA:
POSITION STATEMENT ON SAFE HAVEN LEGISLATION

The Adoption Council of Canada (ACC) strongly supports policies and practices that protect the safety and health of all children and youth, but we do not believe that safe haven legislation is an effective way to meet this goal.

Studies that track abandonment show that safe haven laws have not succeeded in eliminating unsafe, illegal abandonment. Other research suggests that the laws may encourage women to abandon infants who would otherwise have been raised by relatives or placed for adoption through established means. In addition, safe haven legislation deprives one of the biological parents (often the father) of their parenting rights and precludes the abandoned infant from ever knowing his or her genealogical or medical histories.

The ACC believes that children have a right to information about their identity (their birth mother, birth father, or other family members; their heritage; their culture; their family medical history, etc.) and that they—and their adoptive families—will benefit from having this information.

Birth mothers and birth fathers also have the right to supportive services, counselling, and information that will enable them to make the best possible decision for themselves and their children. In addition, First Nations children have the right to the resources accorded to members of federally recognized bands. We believe that a more effective, humane, moral approach to protecting children at risk of abandonment would be the funding of programs for at-risk mothers and fathers.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Rather than move to safe haven legislation after the death of an abandoned child, Provinces and Territories should:

- Strengthen their investment in prenatal and other family support for young, single, or at-risk parents or prospective parents;
- Create and fund a community awareness campaign about the options of adoption, kinship care, and family support;
- Develop a child welfare helpline; and,
- Create and fund programs to educate teachers, parents, doctors, counsellors, and others about how to identify concealed pregnancies and support affected women.

For more information about the ACC's position on safe haven laws, please contact Sarah Pedersen, Executive Director: 1-888-54-ADOPT or sarah@adoption.ca