

Australia may intervene in surrogate baby case (Update)

August 4 2014, by Rod McGuirk



Pattaramon Chanbua, right, kisses her baby boy Gammy at a hospital in Chonburi province, southeastern Thailand Sunday, Aug. 3, 2014. The Australian government is consulting Thai authorities after news emerged that Gammy, a baby with Downs Syndrome was abandoned with Chanbua, his surrogate mother, in Thailand by his Australian parents, according to local media. (AP Photo/Apichart Weerawong)

Australia's government is considering intervening in the case of a baby

with Down syndrome who was left with a Thai surrogate mother by his Australian biological parents, with a minister saying Monday that the child might be entitled to Australian citizenship.

Pattaramon Chanbua, a 21-year-old food vendor in Thailand's seaside town of Sri Racha, is taking care of her 7-month-old surrogate baby, named Gammy, who also has a congenital heart condition. The parents, who have not been identified in the media, took Gammy's healthy twin sister back to their home in Western Australia state.

Australian Immigration Minister Scott Morrison told Sydney Radio 2GB on Monday that Pattaramon "is an absolute hero" and "a saint," adding that the law surrounding the case "is very, very murky."

"We are taking a close look at what can be done here, but I wouldn't want to raise any false hopes or expectations," Morrison said. "We are dealing with something that has happened in another country's jurisdiction."

Morrison's office later said in a statement that "the child may be eligible for Australian citizenship," without elaborating.

Australian citizens are entitled to free health care in Australia.

In Sri Racha on Sunday, Pattaramon said that she was not angry with the biological parents for leaving Gammy behind, and that she hoped they would take care of the boy's twin sister they took with them.



Pattaramon Chanbua, 21, talks on a mobile phone while holding her son Gammy at a hospital in Chonburi province, southeastern Thailand Sunday, Aug. 3, 2014. The Australian government is consulting Thai authorities after news emerged that Gammy, a baby with Downs Syndrome was abandoned with Chanbua, his surrogate mother, in Thailand by his Australian parents, according to local media. (AP Photo/Apichart Weerawong)

"I've never felt angry at them or hated them. I'm always willing to forgive them," Pattaramon told The Associated Press. "I want to see that they love the baby girl as much as my family loves Gammy. I want her to be well taken care of."

Pattaramon was promised 300,000 baht (\$9,300) by a surrogacy agency in Bangkok, Thailand's capital, to be a surrogate for the Australian couple, but she has not been fully paid since the children were born last

December.

She said the agency knew about Gammy's condition four to five months after she became pregnant but did not tell her. It wasn't until the seventh month of her pregnancy when the doctors and the agency told her that one of the twin babies had Down syndrome and suggested that she have an abortion just for him.

Pattaramon recalled strongly rejecting the idea, believing that having the abortion would be sinful. "I asked them, 'Are you still humans?' I really wanted to know," she said.

An online campaign by the Australian charity organization Hands Across the Water to help Gammy has raised more than \$215,000 since July 22.

Mora Kelly, founder of the Children First Foundation, which brings sick children from developing countries to Australia for medical treatment, said she had discussed with Hands Across the Water bringing Gammy to the Australian city of Melbourne for heart surgery.

"I believe that this child should be able to access our health care system here in Australia," Kelly told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "This child, in essence ... should be an Australian citizen."



Pattaramon Chanbua, 21, top, poses with her children Game, 7, left, and baby boy Gammy at a hospital in Chonburi province, southeastern Thailand Sunday, Aug. 3, 2014. The Australian government is consulting Thai authorities after news emerged that Gammy, a baby with Down Syndrome was abandoned with Chanbua, his surrogate mother, in Thailand by his Australian parents, according to local media. (AP Photo/Apichart Weerawong)

But Hands Across the Water founder and chairman Peter Baines said Pattaramon and her family's wishes would need to be considered in any decision to fly Gammy to Australia.

"Certainly our position is that there is no need to bring Gammy out to Australia," Baines said. "There's a high level of medical care available in Thailand and there's nothing to my knowledge that indicates he's suffering from something that can't be treated in Thailand."

Gammy was moved from a public to a private hospital on Saturday. Heart surgery has not been scheduled yet, Baines said.

ABC reported that Gammy's biological father denied intentionally abandoning his son in Thailand, and that he had not known that his new daughter had a twin.

It is illegal to pay a surrogate mother in Australia and in some states, excluding Western Australia, it is also illegal to pay a surrogate living overseas. An Australian woman can act as a surrogate for free, but also has a right to keep the child rather than hand it over to the biological parents.

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