



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026

Submission number: 002

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Standing Committee on Legal Affairs
ACT Legislative Assembly
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Dear Committee,

Re. Submission to the Inquiry into Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026

I am making this submission to the inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026 as an individual victim-survivor of domestic and family violence and a reluctant 'expert by experience'. Five years ago, I left a relationship of two decades that was defined by extreme emotional and financial control, as well as physical violence, perpetrated by my former partner against me and our three children. While it has taken years to feel safe enough to talk about my experience, I recognise that I have valuable insight into how coercive control is enacted in families and how it intersects with other forms of violence. It is this insight that I hope can assist the Inquiry.

I believe that recognising coercive control as a standalone offence is an enormously important step in addressing domestic violence in the community. However, from my own experience, the legislation will *only* be useful to victim-survivors if it is accompanied by education, well-resourced support services and the intentional development of a judicial system that recognises the many ways in which past and continuing coercive control actively constrains a person's capacity to seek recourse for crimes committed. Without this additional work, few victims of coercive control will be in a position to benefit from the legislated amendments. I know that the level of support my family and I needed to leave a situation of violence and re-establish a sense of safety and security, before even thinking about court processes, far exceeded anything available to us. While I appreciated the support of services such as the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) and Victims Support ACT, it was a drop in the bucket compared with the huge need we faced as we began the difficult work of untangling years of domestic violence.

I welcome this legislation as a small but necessary step towards recognising the insidious and pervasive nature of coercive control as a distinct and devastating form of abuse. My lived experience underscores the need for legal frameworks that validate and protect victim-survivors and for an expanded understanding of domestic violence in the community. As such, I encourage the Assembly to pass this Bill with all the urgency it deserves.

Recommendation 1: The Assembly should require the two-year commencement period to be used as a structured implementation phase, with dedicated funding, public reporting and clear milestones for building support services, workforce training, public awareness and frontline domestic violence sector capacity before the offence commences.

Criminalisation is ineffective without robust support systems. The two-year commencement delay should not mean a 24-month accumulation of harm in the community; rather, it should be fully utilised to ensure that when the legislation is implemented, it has the greatest possible chance of success. I urge the Assembly to mandate dedicated funding for: (a) trauma-informed crisis services; (b) peer-led navigation programs to support victim-survivors to manage complex systems; (c) specialised training for police and prosecutors; (d) general training to support greater recognition of, and better responses to,

coercive control, including training for workers in the child protection, community, health, legal and financial sectors; (e) public education campaigns to destigmatise reporting; and (f) best-practice behaviour change programs to address coercive control, including access to programs on a voluntary basis for those who do not meet the criminalisation threshold.

Appropriate support for victim-survivors will ensure that the legislation can be used to its full effect. In my experience, having support, particularly peer and lived-experience support, in navigating services and systems was absolutely essential to escaping domestic violence. However, this role was performed almost entirely in an ad hoc and informal way by friends and proved unsustainable in the long term and damaging to an already fragile support network. Paid peer navigators who are familiar with the relevant services and systems, including the judicial system, would help address the significant barriers that victim-survivors experience. I also note my experience of escalating coercive control in the post-separation period and the impact this had on my capacity to make use of domestic violence provisions in law.

Recommendation 2: Section 72J should be amended or supported by clear statutory guidance so that the assessment of whether conduct is ‘reasonable in all the circumstances’ is informed by the dynamics of coercive control, cumulative patterns of behaviour, the victim-survivor’s context and the risk that apparently ordinary acts may form part of a broader course of abuse.

The nature of coercive control means that it is often hidden, uniquely expressed within the relationship in which it is enacted, and may appear ‘reasonable’ to outsiders when viewed as individual acts. In my own experience of coercive control, lies, misdirection and charm were used not only to hide the abuse from those outside the relationship but also to convince me that I could not trust my own feelings of distress. The inability to trust my perception of reality was a key effect of coercive control and one that is shared by many victim-survivors. It is part of the world-building that perpetrators engage in, which can make it so hard to escape. This was compounded by the eventual collapse of my mental and physical health under the sustained weight of abuse and by the failure of the few health providers from whom I sought help to identify the patterns that shifted a ‘reasonable’ act into coercive control. A memorable example was a counsellor at a respected, publicly funded ACT health provider agreeing that my husband should remove my car keys from me ‘for my own safety’, thereby removing, at a critical point of high risk, an important escape route from physical violence.

The Bill should also provide greater clarity on how victim-survivors can establish patterns of behaviour over time, including whether evidence may include contemporaneous notes, records from support services, accounts from trusted people, digital communications, financial records, health records and other forms of contextual evidence that may not, on their own, appear to prove a criminal offence but collectively demonstrate coercive control.

Recommendation 3: Part 21 should be amended to require meaningful, paid and supported victim-survivor representation on the Advisory Committee and any expert reference group, including more than one lived-experience member to avoid tokenism and isolation.

Lived experience should be explicitly recognised as an appropriate form of ‘experience and skills’ on the Advisory Committee and, if applicable, the expert reference group. Coercive control, by its nature, relies on silencing and marginalisation. Including lived-experience representatives as an integral part of the committee would send a powerful message about whose voices are valued. To be meaningful, this

representation should be paid, trauma-informed, supported and plural rather than tokenistic. Best practice indicates that people with lived experience should *not* be disadvantaged by membership of a committee or group and should not be isolated in the role of a 'sole voice'.

Recommendation 4: The three-year review under section 72K should be strengthened by requiring an evaluation framework before commencement, annual public reporting and measurable outcomes that assess whether the legislation improves safety, access to justice and system responses for victim-survivors.

In this context, measurable outcomes should include reporting rates, withdrawal rates, prosecution and conviction rates, timeframes, victim-survivor experience and satisfaction, community recognition of coercive control, workforce confidence, and whether the legislation is being applied consistently and safely. Evaluation should include baseline data, disaggregated data where appropriate, and qualitative evidence from victim-survivors, including those who choose not to pursue a criminal conviction or who disengage from the process.

Recommendation 5: The Bill, implementation plan and review framework should explicitly recognise intersectional disadvantage and require culturally safe, disability-inclusive and trauma-informed responses for victim-survivors who face additional barriers to safety, disclosure and justice.

Where a person experiences other forms of disadvantage, or perceives barriers to seeking support, they may be at increased risk of coercive control and may face greater difficulty accessing protection through the legal system. This includes people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people with insecure immigration status; older people; people with disabilities; people experiencing poor mental health or alcohol and other drug issues; and people with a history of involvement with the judicial or child protection systems, or a history of involvement in crime, including those who have been coerced into criminal activity. Implementation should therefore include targeted consultation, accessible information, culturally safe pathways, disability-inclusive supports and safeguards to reduce the risk that criminalisation produces unintended harm for already marginalised victim-survivors.

I thank the committee for undertaking this important work and for inviting submissions on a legislative Amendment that will significantly strengthen the ACT's response to domestic violence. If you have any questions arising from this submission, I would be very happy to provide any additional insights.

Yours sincerely,

Elisabeth Yar