



# Submission cover sheet

## **Inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026**

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Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
Canberra ACT 2601

9 July 2026

## RE: Inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026

Dear Committee Members

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety's inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill). The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria and Tasmania, representing more than 150 member organisations delivering services across the child and family welfare continuum, including family violence response and recovery, family support, and out-of-home care. While our membership is based in Victoria and Tasmania, coercive control does not respect jurisdictional boundaries, and reform in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has direct relevance to the practice, workforce and evidence base that informs our national policy work.

We note that the ACT Government has announced its intention to legislate, has committed to an implementation timeframe informed by education and training, and operates under its own *Human Rights Act 2024 (ACT)*. This Act explicitly recognises and protects children's right to the care and protection necessary for their wellbeing, by reason of their status as children.

In this submission, the Centre does not take a position for or against the criminalisation of coercive control. That question has been considered in detail elsewhere by experts, including by Safe and Equal, the peak body for specialist family violence services in Victoria, whose February 2026 position paper concluded that criminalisation alone was not the most effective path to victim-survivor safety (within a Victorian context). Our submission focuses instead on the implications for children and young people. Regardless of the model ultimately adopted by the Assembly, children and young people must be visible, protected and resourced within it, not included as an afterthought to an offence framed around adult intimate partner violence.

To this end, we have made six recommendations focused on implementing a whole-of-system response; providing appropriate resourcing to meet the needs of children, young people and other victim-survivors; preventing the misidentification of protective parents and carers; developing appropriate indicators to measure the impact of the Bill; and viewing young people using violence in the home through a trauma-informed lens.

### Children and young people are not simply bystanders

Public discourse around coercive control focuses primarily on the intimate partner relationship at the centre of the proposed offence. However, children living in these households are not incidental to that relationship, rather, they are shaped by it every day. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that exposure to domestic and family violence is the most common form of maltreatment experienced by Australian children, and that it substantially increases the likelihood of a child also experiencing other forms of abuse or neglect (Haslam et al., 2023). A 2024 systematic review of interparental coercive control found consistent



associations with disrupted parenting and attachment, and with children's socio-emotional, behavioural and physical health outcomes (Xyrakis et al., 2024). Longitudinal Australian research has since linked childhood exposure to coercive and controlling behaviour with a significantly elevated risk of mental illness and health-risk behaviour in adulthood (University of Queensland, 2025).

Coercive control also shapes children's lives after separation. Research shows how perpetrators continue to use children as instruments of control long after the relationship ends, including through post-separation contact, stalking, and legal matters (Katz et al., 2020). Any legislative response to coercive control is inherently a child and family policy measure, irrespective of whether it was intentionally developed in that context.

### **Getting implementation right for children**

The Australian Institute of Criminology recently reported findings from 130 in-depth interviews with female victim-survivors of coercive control nationally, following an earlier national survey of more than 1,200 victim survivors (Fitz-Gibbon, Walklate, Meyer, & Reeves, 2024). Most participants supported criminalisation, but their support was consistently conditional. Victim-survivors, many of whom were mothers describing the effect of coercive control on their children, told the researchers that a new offence on its own would not deliver safety. What they asked for was a whole-of-system response which included better trained police, prosecutors and judicial officers; sustained community awareness; and properly resourced support services.

The same study, and the broader body of Australian research that it builds on, also confirmed the risk of victim-survivors being misidentified as the person using violence is real, and that this most affects women from First Nations, migrant, and other marginalised communities (Fitz-Gibbon, Walklate, Meyer, & Reeves, 2024).

The experience of Australian jurisdictions which have already criminalised coercive control offers additional practical lessons for the ACT, several of which have direct implications for children and the services that support them. First, community awareness and disclosure effects need to be resourced. Following the commencement of a public awareness campaign and the standalone offence in New South Wales, specialist family violence services reported an increase in people, including mothers, contacting them to talk through their experiences of coercive control (Kidd & Soliman-Marran, 2025).

An increase in disclosure is a positive outcome. The child and family service system must be appropriately resourced to work alongside police and the courts – to ensure there is capacity to respond. Any ACT implementation plan should be accompanied by dedicated resources for specialist family violence, child and family, and therapeutic services to support children and young people, and their families.

Second, misidentification is a known and serious risk, and children are disproportionately affected by its consequences. Where a protective parent, usually a mother, is wrongly identified as the person using violence, the consequences flow directly to her children through disrupted care arrangements, involvement of statutory child protection, and loss of trust in the system that was meant to protect the family. Victim-survivors themselves identified this as one of their central concerns about criminalisation in the national study discussed above, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2024).

Research and practice literature consistently identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, migrant and refugee women, and women with disability as being at heightened risk of misidentification more broadly (Reeves et al., 2025; Nancarrow et al., 2020). A new criminal offence, applied without a clear evidence-informed framework for identifying the person most in need of protection, creates a further avenue through which a perpetrator can manipulate the system. This dynamic has already been documented in Scotland following the introduction of its own coercive control offence (Lombard, Proctor, & Whiting, 2022).



Third, workforce capability needs to extend well beyond police and courts. Victim-survivors in other jurisdictions have reported that police decision-making often remains anchored to discrete incidents of physical violence rather than the pattern of behaviour the offence is meant to capture (Myhill, Hohl, & Johnson, 2023; Barlow & Walklate, 2025). Family violence, child and family, and education workforces are frequently the first to see coercive control being used in a family, well before police involvement. Training and cultural change should be built with, and extended to, this wider workforce.

Finally, the intersection with adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) warrants specific attention. Family and child welfare practitioners are increasingly working with young people who use violence in the home against parents, caregivers, and/or siblings, in the context of the child's own trauma and developmental needs. As the ACT considers the final scope of the offence, care should be taken to make sure that the law responds to genuinely coercive and controlling adult behaviour without inadvertently criminalising trauma-driven behaviour by young people.

The Centre recommends that the Committee consider the following in its report on the Bill:

**Recommendation 1:** That any implementation plan for the Bill delivers a whole-of-system response, including mandatory funded training for police, prosecutors and judicial officers on the developmental and relational impacts of coercive control on children, developed in partnership with the child and family services sector.

**Recommendation 2:** That the ACT Government commit dedicated, ongoing resourcing for specialist family violence, child and family, and therapeutic services ahead of commencement, in anticipation of increased disclosure and demand consistent with the experience of other jurisdictions.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Government develop and publish clear, evidence-informed guidance to prevent the misidentification of protective parents and carers as respondents, with particular attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, migrant and refugee women, and women with disability.

**Recommendation 4:** That training and cultural change initiatives extend beyond police and courts to include the family violence, child and family, education, and health workforces who are often the first to observe coercive control in a family's life.

**Recommendation 5:** That the statutory review required after commencement include specific, measurable indicators of the Bill's impact on children and young people, developed in consultation with the child and family sector, and with children and young people themselves.

**Recommendation 6:** That the final scope of the offence and its interaction with AVITH be reviewed to avoid criminalising trauma-driven behaviour amongst young people.

In summary, the Centre recognises the ACT Government's intention to strengthen the legal response to coercive control and the difficult policy trade-offs involved in that task. Our submission calls for children and young people to be kept in clear view throughout implementation of the Bill. Every child affected by coercive control has the right to an outcome that improves their safety and stability and does not add to the trauma already experienced.

Sincerely,

**Jamie Crosby**

Chief Executive Officer

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare



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