



Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police
Association canadienne des chefs de police

Submission for the House of Commons' Standing
Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Bill C-16: Protecting Victims Act

Presented by:
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On behalf of:

Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

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Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to appear today to speak to Bill C-16 and its focus on strengthening Canada's response to gender-based violence and victim protection.

From a policing and victim-centred perspective, we are increasingly aware that intimate partner violence is not always defined by a single incident. It is often a pattern of behaviour, one that includes **coercive control**, psychological harm, and ongoing intimidation. These patterns can be difficult to identify, document, and respond to within traditional, incident-based policing frameworks.

In Canada, police report over 110,000 victims of intimate partner violence each year¹. However, what these numbers capture are incidents that have already reached a criminal threshold. What they do not capture is the prolonged and cumulative harm caused by coercive control; harm that often precedes physical violence and, in some cases, domestic homicide.

Canadian data from Statistics Canada also shows that psychological abuse is widely experienced in intimate partner relationships.² These behaviours, control, intimidation, and isolation, often occur without physical violence and are not always captured in traditional police responses.

Research has also shown that patterns of controlling behaviour and escalation are strongly associated with domestic homicide.³ This reinforces the importance of recognizing patterns of behaviour over time. Individuals who exercise coercive control are often times repeat and violent offenders.

Bill C-16 represents a critical step forward by recognizing coercive control as part of the continuum of intimate partner violence. Importantly, the CACP recommends that the legislation explicitly include former intimate partners, regardless of living arrangements, to reflect the reality that control and abuse frequently continue after separation, often amplified and facilitated by technology.

Victim impact statements and testimonial aids, as supported in Bill C-16, are essential tools. They ensure that the lived experiences of victims are meaningfully considered and that victims are supported throughout the justice process. It is encouraging that Bill C-16 is giving more weight to victims' rights.

Bill C-16 includes provisions related to sentencing in certain areas. From a policing perspective, we also see that victims' confidence in the justice system can be influenced by their experience with the process and outcomes. This can affect their willingness to engage in what is often a long and difficult process.⁴

From a policing perspective, by the time an incident meets a criminal threshold, there has often been an ongoing pattern of control and harm. Earlier recognition of coercive control is critical to better assessing risk and intervening sooner.

¹ Statistics Canada, Family violence in Canada, Juristat reports (2023)

² Statistics Canada, Intimate partner violence: Experiences of women and men, General Social Survey.

³ Department of Justice Canada, *A Literature Review of Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Violence* (2020); Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (annual reports); and provincial Domestic Violence Death Review Committee reports.

⁴ Report of the Mission to Great Britain on criminalization of coercive control, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, page 21

We are already seeing this shift reflected internationally. Jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and parts of Australia have introduced coercive control legislation. Their experience shows that this is an important step forward; however, one that requires careful implementation, strong training, and clear investigative guidance.

In Canada, we are also seeing important work emerging in this space. Research led by Dr. Carmen Gill is helping to better define and measure coercive control in ways that will support both policy and practice.

From a policing perspective, this will also require us to evolve how we assess risk, including the integration of coercive control indicators into existing risk assessment tools.

However, legislation alone will not be enough to change outcomes.

To be effective, this Bill must be supported by clear implementation strategies, including training for police and justice system partners, enhanced risk assessment tools, and the ability to gather and present evidence that reflects cumulative harm over time.

There are also important considerations related to consistency in application and the potential for unintended consequences.

One of the key concerns we need to be mindful of is the risk of misidentification or unintended criminalization of victims, particularly in complex cases where victims may present as resistant, defensive, or are involved in dual allegations.

Without a clear understanding of coercive control, there is a real risk that the person experiencing abuse could be misidentified as the offender.

This reinforces the importance of trauma-informed approaches and specialized expertise in intimate partner violence investigations.

At the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, we have emphasized the importance of trauma-informed, victim-centered policing. Our national frameworks highlight the need to move beyond reactive responses and toward approaches that recognize the full context of victimization.

Bill C-16 aligns with this direction.

With the right supports in place, it has the potential to strengthen early intervention, improve victim safety, and enhance accountability for those who cause harm.

To support the success of this legislation, we would recommend that implementation be accompanied by national guidance, training, and risk assessment tools to support consistent, trauma-informed application across jurisdictions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion. I look forward to your questions.