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Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman



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• (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

It's currently 4:32 p.m.

Welcome to meeting number 128 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I would like to remind all members of the following points: Please wait until I recognize you by name prior to speaking, and I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 25, 2024, the committee will continue with its study of gender-based violence and femicides.

Before we welcome our witnesses—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): I'm sorry for interrupting, Madam Chair. I have a point of order.

I don't know if it's the same for Ms. Larouche, but there seems to be a problem with the sound.

[*English*]

The Chair: For those of you who are online, we are dealing with something.

We will continue.

I was about to suggest that prior to welcoming our witnesses, I'd like to provide a trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence and femicide, and this may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or need help at any point, please advise the clerk.

For all witnesses and all members of Parliament, it is important that we recognize that these are difficult discussions, so we should try to be as compassionate as possible.

For today's panel, we have, from the Canadian Anti-Stalking Association, Julie S. Lalonde, executive director.

Welcome.

From the Crime Victims Assistance Centre, we have Jackie Huet, director general of the Estrie region, and Karine Gagnon, organiza-

tional support and development coordinator, who are both joining us by video conference.

From McMaster University, we have Lenore Lukasik-Foss, director of the sexual violence prevention and response office in the equity and inclusion office.

Joining us by video conference, from the Peterborough Police Service, is Stuart Betts, chief of police.

We will begin with opening remarks of up to five minutes. For witnesses and members, moving forward throughout the course of the meeting, I will be delicately and politely raising my one-minute and 30-second signs to keep the meeting as organized and efficient as we can.

At this point, I would like to invite Ms. Lalonde to start.

You have the floor for your opening statement of up to five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde (Executive director, Canadian Anti-Stalking Association): Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Julie S. Lalonde, and I have been working to end gender-based violence for 22 years.

During my career, I have trained more than 50,000 Canadians on their role as witnesses to help prevent violence. I have created awareness campaigns, developed policies and had countless difficult conversations about the reality of men's violence against women in Canada. I have also experienced it.

• (1635)

[*English*]

When I was 18 years old, I found myself in an abusive relationship. It took me two years and two tries, but I did what we told women to do and I left. Unfortunately for me and countless other women across Canada, this did not end the violence, but instead set off a new form. I went on to be stalked by my abusive ex-boyfriend for a decade. The terror only ended with his sudden death a few weeks after my 30th birthday.

A few weeks after that, I was scheduled to speak at the annual Take Back the Night march happening in Pembroke. I had been working in the community for the past few years, researching the experiences of rural sexual assault survivors, who are so often forgotten by policy-makers living in big cities like Ottawa and Toronto. It felt like the perfect setting to share my story aloud for the first time.

Instead, on September 22, 2015, rather than standing on a street corner with a megaphone to break the silence, I was barricaded inside the sexual assault centre with my colleagues because one angry, vengeful man went on a rampage. Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam were killed that day by a man who had previously been incarcerated for committing violence against women. Again, we could not march in the streets to fight violence against women because our lives were at risk.

Much has been said about Carol, Anastasia and Nathalie's murders. The 2022 coroner's inquest into the triple femicides concluded with 86 recommendations. I encourage committee members to read the report, as well as the Mass Casualty Commission report and the Femicide Observatory's yearly reports. There is so much important research and analysis already out there to help us end gender-based violence. We are not lacking in recommendations.

For today's purposes, I would like to focus on one specific recommendation regarding criminal harassment. Stalking is a precursor to femicide. If you are being stalked, your life is at risk. This is not a matter of opinion; it is a well-established fact, by every possible risk assessment tool in existence.

Why do women's shelters exist? They exist because women fleeing intimate partner violence need a safe place to land. Why are women's shelters' addresses kept confidential? They are kept confidential because those women are being stalked.

We know that stalking is a major red flag, yet in Canada, we lack the public conversations necessary to drive home its severity. Most people do not even know what stalking is, how common it is or how dangerous it is. As a result, they do not intervene to help or call out their friends and loved ones who engage in the behaviour, and victims themselves rarely understand the danger they are facing.

This is our current reality, but it need not be our future one. I am imploring this committee to listen to experts and implement the changes needed to end this epidemic.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lalonde.

Next I would like to welcome Madame Gagnon and Madame Huet.

[*Translation*]

Ladies, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Karine Gagnon (Organizational Support and Development Coordinator, CAVAC Network): Good morning. My name is Karine Gagnon, and I am the organizational support and development coordinator for the Réseau des Centres d'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels, or the CAVAC Network. I am accompanied by my colleague Jackie Huet, director general of CAVAC in the Estrie region. Thank you for having us today.

The CAVAC Network's mission is to bring together all the CAVACs in the province of Quebec and to promote the needs of victims of crime, their loved ones and witnesses of such events. Our mission is also to seek out and share best practices in victimology intervention, to facilitate their harmonization, to make them

known and to promote the expertise of CAVACs in this area, as well as to support the deployment of services.

Our network includes the province's 17 CAVACs, whose mission is to provide services to all victims of crime, regardless of their sex, age, gender identity and when the event occurred. These services, free of charge and confidential, are offered to everyone, whether or not the person has reported what they experienced to the authorities.

Today, we want to talk to you about certain services and specific teams that are put in place in our network to support people who are victims of gender-based violence—in other words, sexual violence and domestic violence.

When it comes to sexual violence, we act particularly in the area of sexual exploitation. We have a sexual exploitation response team of five workers across five regions of Quebec where the phenomenon is more frequent than elsewhere—in the Outaouais, Laval, Montérégie, Montreal and the Quebec City region. This response team works very actively and proactively with victims of this type of violence. It also works closely with police services that are dedicated to the fight against procuring, among other things. The teams located in these five regions also work in collaboration with each of the 17 CAVACs, which have sexual violence liaison and response officers.

These resources were put in place within the CAVACs in the wake of the #MeToo movement so that there would be at least one worker assigned to this type of victim who would, among other things, be able to follow up with victims in the five targeted regions. These people would not live in those regions, but they would like to return to their original region of residence.

As a result, there is really collaborative work and outreach to help victims get out of that environment and support them in terms of the consequences of their experience.

I will now yield the floor to my colleague Ms. Huet, who will talk to you specifically about the specialized court, the role of our liaison socio-judicial workers, as well as rapid response units in high-risk situations in the province.

● (1640)

Ms. Jackie Huet (Director General, CAVAC, Estrie Region, CAVAC Network): Good morning.

My name is Jackie Huet. I am a criminologist and the director general of the Estrie CAVAC, where I have been working for seven years. Prior to this position, I was a direct victim response officer.

We want to talk to you today about the most recent progress made in terms of our services. In 2022, when the specialized court on sexual and domestic violence was created, the Quebec Department of Justice gave us a new role, that of liaison socio-judicial worker, or ISL. In doing so, the department was trying to introduce a new approach, a safe approach, in partnership with the Crown prosecutor. This approach focused specifically on victims whom we were unable to reach, particularly those who are still under the control of the spouse or when there are requests to withdraw the charges.

This approach has really been tailored to the needs of these people, especially those with whom it is difficult to communicate. In addition, all CAVACs found that rapid response units for domestic violence were deployed in various forms in virtually all regions. These units make it possible to bring together a number of organizations around a table in a few hours, or in a day or two, to intervene and discuss cases that may involve a risk, such as situations where there is a risk of homicide in a spousal context. We could also take the idea of rapid response units, in which CAVACs participate, further.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

At this point, I would like to welcome Ms. Lukasik-Foss for five minutes.

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss (Director, Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office, Equity and Inclusion Office, McMaster University): Good afternoon, honourable members, staff and guests. Thank you so much for the opportunity to address this committee on the issue of gender-based violence and femicide against women, girls and gender-diverse people in Canada.

Today I'm appearing on behalf of McMaster University's Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office and bringing over 30 years of experience in working to end all forms of gender-based and sexual violence in my community and beyond.

Before I continue, I'd like to share this: Ten years ago, on October 21, 2014—almost to the day, actually—I appeared before another parliamentary committee to discuss the issue of gender-based violence as it relates to homicide. Back then, we didn't call it “femicide”. I'm deeply saddened and angered that 10 years later, in many aspects, the situation is worse for women, girls and gender-diverse people in Canada, despite legislative and funding improvements.

I know this committee understands that we're facing an epidemic of gender-based violence in Canada. As University of Ottawa researcher and expert Dr. Holly Johnson states:

Gender-based violence is perhaps the most wide-spread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.

We also know that gender-based violence is systemic and disproportionately impacts certain groups of Canadian women, girls and gender-diverse people. For example, indigenous women are killed at nearly seven times the rate of non-indigenous women. I also want to take a moment to highlight how gender-based violence is a serious concern on college and university campuses across Canada,

a situation that has only been heightened in the postpandemic context. Women aged 15 to 24 are five times more likely than women over 25 to be physically or sexually assaulted by a non-intimate partner.

I know I don't need to convince this committee about the seriousness of this problem. I understand that many previous speakers have shared statistics on the prevalence of GBV, including femicide, and not just for this study. We also have numerous Canadian reports and recommendations, and we have heard from thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of survivors over the years. The 2019 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and trans and 2-spirit people released 231 calls for justice. In 2022, a Renfrew County inquest released 86 recommendations. In 2023, the Mass Casualty Commission released 130 recommendations, including 17 that specifically address gender-based violence. Seven provinces have domestic violence death review committees. Ontario had the first domestic violence death review committee in 2003. Since that time, they've reviewed over 500 deaths and made numerous recommendations. We have learned time and again that domestic violence deaths are preventable. Finally, we have a national action plan to end gender-based violence, and several provincial plans.

You might be wondering where I'm going with this. We have at our fingertips the evidence and best practices to proceed. We know what to do. As my colleague says, there's no shortage of recommendations, so what's getting in the way of our moving forward?

I can share with you that this feels frustrating, 30 years into this work, working with survivors who need things to change now and who are terrified for their lives, but I don't give up hope or stop working for change. I believe Canada can be a leader on ending all forms of gender-based violence, including femicide.

How do we get there? In addition to fully implementing the five pillars of our national action plan, I believe we need further coordination and accountability.

I want to share a promising approach that has the potential to facilitate real and lasting change and to help us move the needle. Last week, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund released a report authored by Dr. Amanda Dale. It is entitled “What It Takes: Establishing a Gender-Based Violence Accountability Mechanism in Canada”. This excellent report outlines a path for the establishment of an independent gender-based violence commissioner, similar to an ombudsperson.

● (1645)

This office would strengthen the monitoring of Canada's adherence to international obligations concerning gender-based violence. This commissioner would also work in tandem with a national indigenous and human rights ombudsperson, which actually is call to justice 1.7. A report on this was just released on October 2, so it's quite relevant and timely. By creating an independent commissioner, Canada can join England, Wales, Finland and Australia as a leader in working to end all forms of gender-based violence and femicide.

Thank you.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'd like to welcome Mr. Betts as our last witness today.

Mr. Stuart Betts (Chief of Police, Peterborough Police Service): Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: I should say Chief Betts.

Mr. Stuart Betts: That's okay. Thank you.

My name is Stuart Betts, and I am the chief of police for the Peterborough Police Service in the city of Peterborough, situated just 75 minutes northeast of Toronto. We are not immune to the types of crimes that happen in larger urban centres.

Thank you for the invitation to speak today on the subject of gender-based violence, and specifically femicide.

Let me make it clear that I do not hold myself out to be a subject matter expert on the subject of intimate partner violence, and nor am I a subject matter expert on femicide, but as chief of police, I am very much aware of the importance of this subject and the devastating after-effects of these types of crimes.

I was the deputy chief of police in London, Ontario, and worked with the police services board there when in 2022 they made a submission to the Prime Minister calling for femicide to be included in the Criminal Code of Canada.

In advance of today's meeting, I met with my victim services and intimate partner violence coordinators and sought their input as subject matter experts.

I also obtained a statement from Nathalie Leclerc, the daughter of Lise Fredette, who was the victim of a femicide—if femicide had existed as a Criminal Code offence—on November 12, 2014. Lise Fredette was 74 years old when she was murdered in Peterborough by her ex-partner, who was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison three years later.

Ms. Leclerc has provided me with permission to read the following:

My mother was strong-willed, hard-working, spoke her mind openly, and devoted herself deeply to her family, especially her grandchildren. She was the kind of person who, well into her senior years, took pride in her independence.

My fondest memories were the nightly phone calls we shared.

Those conversations were a cherished part of our bond, filled with warmth and support and laughter.

My mother confided that her ex-partner was struggling to move on.

As a daughter, I often reflect on signs that I may have missed.

During their relationship, there were numerous subtle behaviours that, in hindsight, were clear indicators of coercive control.

My mother told me about the letters and baked goods her ex-partner would leave at her door and mentioned even seeing him watching her with binoculars.

Despite Police intervention, this continued for some time before her death.

I often reflect on what her life might have been like if she had the chance to live it fully.

Today, she would have been 84 years old, and she would surely be retired, enjoying the arrival of her great-grandchild, and spending time with her family.

Sadly, I can report that Lise Fredette's body has never been found.

Obtaining accurate, reliable and comparable statistics for calls for service for intimate partner violence is nearly impossible. Intimate partner violence is, in and of itself, not a criminal offence; rather, it's the behaviours committed by those against their partners or ex-partners that form that offence. Therefore, intimate partner violence is not captured as part of the uniform crime report survey for police-reported crimes.

As the immediate past co-chair of the police information and statistics committee for the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, I can attest to the fact that we have made attempts to capture the data regarding intimate partner violence, most recently during the pandemic, but as of yet, no standard methodology for categorizing this type of call for service exists. I tell you this because in the context of femicide, most often connected with intimate partner violence, it's difficult to report data with any degree of accuracy.

This, of course, leads to the question at hand: Should femicide be included in the Criminal Code of Canada? This is a difficult question, because it asks us, the police, to address underlying motives when women are killed for no reason other than because they're women.

I have given a great deal of thought to this question. I believe such crimes do need to be considered. The question is, how? Some might suggest that it could and should be included in existing hate crime criteria. There may be a good argument for that, which would suggest that it could be contemplated at sentencing as an aggravating factor, but as a chief of police, I know there remains a great deal of community confusion about hate crimes—what they are, what they are not and how they're addressed by the police and the courts.

Such confusion often undermines the seriousness of the occurrence. More importantly, it undermines the trust and confidence in the judicial system itself. Quite frankly, in the wake of such confusion, communities that are affected directly, as well as indirectly, feel abandoned and devalued by those they turn to for safety and justice.

Therefore, if a clear and unequivocal message is to be sent about the horrific killing of a woman simply because they are a woman, and for no other reason than that, then it stands to reason that a stand-alone Criminal Code offence of femicide would be the approach that would make the most sense to the most people.

● (1655)

I would only suggest that either approach must be more than performative measures to address such crimes. If we're serious about the importance of this and if it's important enough to establish a committee, then it's important enough to provide the adequate supports and resources that must be followed to make it meaningful.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, and thank you all for your opening remarks.

I would also like to acknowledge that Mr. Carolo was unable to be here today to testify and that we will be making arrangements for him to join a further meeting.

Again, thank you to all the witnesses for your opening remarks.

At this point, we will move to our first round of questions.

I open the floor to MP Ferreri for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much to all of our witnesses for the work that you do on the front lines and for sharing such incredible stories that need to be told. We can't manage it if we don't talk about it.

When we're talking about femicides, we're talking about intimate partner violence, and 94 municipalities in Ontario have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic.

Chief Betts, I've had the privilege to go out with some of your officers on ride-alongs, and the calls of domestic violence are shocking. Do you have any stats to share with the committee on the number of domestic calls you would have, and have you've seen a change in those numbers in your time?

Mr. Stuart Betts: Thank you.

Through you, Chair, I do have 2023 stats for year-end, and of course for the year to date right now.

I can tell you that as of this particular time, year to date, this year we've had 1,132 calls related to domestic violence or intimate partner violence. The reason I'm going to suggest that this is significant is that we are a community of 100,000 people, and as we know, crime rates are on a per 100,000 per capita basis. This is a pretty good demographic and a pretty good community to use as a measure.

Last year, we had 1,457. Our community includes a university and a college. When I say we're not immune to the types of offences that happen in larger urban centres, I'd say it's largely because of not only the population base that we have, but also the students who come to our community. We've heard here today that our students are not immune to this type of violence either.

Out of those 1,132 so far this year, 238 have resulted in charges.

Now, this is difficult, and that's not to say that the rest were not intimate partner violence, but they come in as what's called a "domestic violence occurrence". In a community like most policed communities, that occurrence incorporates family violence, which

may not in fact trigger what we would look at as a mandatory charge related to domestic violence. It could be siblings who are called in, or it might be a parent with a child. However, for intimate partner violence, there have been 238 charges as a result of those calls.

Hopefully, that's what you asked for.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you. Yes, that's great.

One of the things that we're hearing a lot is that victim survivors are calling the police, and sometimes they don't feel supported or heard or that it takes too long to get to the call. I think it's very important to point out that police have now been tasked with being social service workers as well as police officers, and it's obviously taking a toll on the front line as well.

For me, when we look at the intimate partner violence, the best way to help with this is through the law. It is to ensure that criminals understand that there are consequences. Stalkers, as Ms. Lalonde has referred to, know that they can get away with it, which is just horrific. I think that is the biggest piece of this puzzle.

Chief Betts, what would you say to that? I don't know anybody other than police who really want to catch the bad guy, but if you catch the bad guy, and he goes to court.... I've sat in these bail courts, and then they're just released. We heard from Ms. Alexander that he bludgeoned her almost to death, and he was released on \$500 bail the next day.

Where's that gap? Police charge people with criminal behaviour, but then the next piece of that puzzle is that they are held and then they're released on bail.

● (1700)

Mr. Stuart Betts: Thank you.

Chair, through you, it's a troubling thing for us. Of course, you've heard the call for bail reform from police chiefs across this country and here in Ontario. It results in a bit of a revolving door or a catch-and-release situation in which we are constantly trying to provide that process for safety.

We engage our victim services as best we can, and we provide, as all police services do, safety planning for those victims. Unfortunately, those victims are left by themselves. When the perpetrator or the accused is let out of jail, there's nobody standing on their doorstep between them and that perpetrator.

I know we've seen the recent use of ankle bracelets. That's well and good—subject, of course, to those batteries working. I can tell you that the police will become the battery police as well. When those batteries start to die, or when they do die, who's called to go and make sure somebody changes those batteries? It's the police. Although this results in another interaction with the accused, it unfortunately also goes to show some of the frailty of the system when they are let out, even with a tracker.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you.

I know I only have 30 seconds left.

I have two questions. It's a quick yes or no.

Obviously, my first question is, would you like to see Bill C-75 scrapped?

Mr. Stuart Betts: I would like to see it definitely modified, yes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: My second question is on this: One of the most shocking things I saw when I sat in your office was some of the stats about the children exposed to domestic violence and intimate partner violence. They are learning that this is what a relationship is.

I don't know whether you have those stats, and I know we're running out of time. Could you table them for the committee?

Children being exposed is probably one of the most troubling things I can say about this study.

Mr. Stuart Betts: Thank you.

Chair, through you, I would absolutely agree. It continues that cycle of violence and it continues a generational trauma passed down from parent to child.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ferreri.

MP Sonia Sidhu, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being with us and sharing your knowledge today.

My first question is for Ms. Lalonde.

First of all, thank you for your efforts and the public education you are doing.

In 2014, a general social survey on Canadian safety found that nearly one in five victims of stalking also experienced actual physical violence.

What sort of preventive strategies are needed to keep stalking from escalating to femicide? You said that early intervention and recognizing stalking behaviour can prevent the escalation to femicide. I want to know your views.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Thank you.

What we need to recognize is that when it comes to stalking, we are where sexual violence was 30 years ago. We don't even have a "Stalking101" understanding of what this looks like in Canada. When I use the term "criminal harassment", Canadians look at me and say, "What?" They don't even know that's the legal term for it.

A general 101 knowledge about what stalking is, what it looks like, how it's a problem and what we can do about it is lacking.

In January, I started the Canadian Anti-Stalking Association because we have never had a single organization in Canada dedicated to stalking—not one. We have shelters, which is great. We have sexual assault centres, which is fantastic. However, there's nowhere to go if you're a victim of stalking. People are going to Google to figure out whether this is even a crime and who they can talk to about it.

We are at that first step of needing to use all resources at our disposal to educate the public on what this looks like in person and certainly in the encroaching reality of online harassment as well.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you for raising online harassment. This is something I know we need to do a lot more on.

With the reported rise of sexual assault, particularly level 2 offences, what specific support system do you believe should be prioritized to assist survivors throughout the legal process when they are going through it? I want your views.

Ms. Lukasik-Foss, you can add your views in there too.

• (1705)

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I would love to see free legal advice for victims of stalking.

In Ontario, we had a pilot project whereby you could get a few hours of free legal advice if you were a sexual assault survivor. I would love to see the same thing for stalking, because there is some nuance. There are behaviours that are abhorrent but do not, unfortunately, cross the threshold into illegality. You could have a civil option and sue somebody for harassment, even if it doesn't meet.... However, most people don't know that.

I think a certificate program through which victims would be given a few hours of free legal advice would be an incredible first step. It's low-hanging fruit that would make a tremendous difference.

I will pass it to Lenore.

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: I agree with Ms. Lalonde's comments. That legal certificate program was so helpful. There was quite a lot of uptake.

In terms of supports, I think it's just recognizing that for most victims of sexual violence, or really any form of gender-based violence, the vast majority—anywhere from 90% to 95%—do not report to official channels in the criminal system or other authorities. We need to make sure that folks get the support in other ways and that there are counsellors, trauma counsellors, peer support and a variety of options available for survivors who are dealing with this.

For example, we know that young people in the university or college context are more likely to talk to each other. We need to really up our bystander intervention work and teach folks how to deal with a disclosure. What do you do? How are you supporting your friend in that situation?

I think there's so much work we can do around prevention and bystander intervention and around ensuring that we have those supports so that when survivors come forward, there is actually counselling and support. Right now, in our local sexual assault centre in Hamilton, there's a six-month wait-list. When I am a survivor and I am terrified and I make that first call, I'm told that I have to wait six months to speak to someone.

I know that they try their best in the meanwhile to give support, but folks need that access. That's a difficulty.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: At our last meeting, we had witnesses from Peel. I'm from Brampton. We heard from Shelina Jeshani, the director of Safe Centre of Peel, about the importance of integrating services so that the victim can easily get the help they need.

You talked about mental health. You talked about legal services. How can a woman get these services under one roof? The Safe Centre of Peel is doing amazing work. There are 16 offices there. Those are integrated services, especially for racialized women, with an intersectional lens.

What needs to be done on that side?

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: I think that is quite key. You need to ensure that your services are meeting the needs of all survivors. You need to have that intersectional lens for survivors—racialized, indigenous, gender diverse, non-binary, etc. You want to make sure that, looking around, you can see that there's a space for everyone in your services, and also see who's not walking through your doors and why.

I think the other key is that not all communities have that kind of one-stop space. I think there is still much that can be done. I know, for example, that in the service we offer at the university, it's our role to make those connections. When someone comes in, there's no wrong door. We link them up; hopefully, the case manager can then do all of the connecting, supporting and linking for that person. When an individual has experienced this kind of violence and trauma, having them make phone calls and go through the maze of systems is not okay.

I think it's important that we have well-funded services that are directly meeting the needs of all the victims so that they feel they can reach out and they won't have to do a lot of running around.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you.

Thank you, MP Sidhu.

Next is MP Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us and contributing to the committee's current study. We are considering a situation that is happening more often and that is referred to as an epidemic. I'm talking about femicides. Therefore, this study is extremely important.

My first questions are for Ms. Gagnon and Ms. Huet.

In your opening remarks, you talked about the collaborative work you are doing.

How could the criminalization of coercive control help you? How could that facilitate the process of responding to women who may be victims of this type of control, this violence?

What would you recommend to the federal government?

• (1710)

Ms. Jackie Huet: I can start answering the question, and then Ms. Gagnon can add to my remarks, if she likes.

Amendments could be made to the Criminal Code. Far too much weight is still being placed on the victims' shoulders. For a few years now, in Quebec, we've been working a lot on supporting victims to try to protect them. We have made a lot of progress, but there is still far too much weight on their shoulders, especially when it comes to reporting. We have already seen some good things being done about coercive control, but what people seem to be saying is that judicial actors need to be better trained.

Simply integrating coercive control into the Criminal Code is not going to solve everything, as it would be very difficult for police and prosecutors to enforce. However, it may be appropriate to train judicial actors on this phenomenon so that they know that it is something concrete and that it can be criminalized, based on what we are seeing elsewhere, while adding nuances.

In Quebec, the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale produced a very worthwhile report on the subject.

Ms. Karine Gagnon: I would like to add some comments.

We were asked about it during the consultations on the criminalization of coercive control. We even sent a letter in support of the recommendations of the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale in Quebec.

Criminalizing coercive control doesn't solve everything, but it gives authorities an additional tool to take into account the lived context and not just isolated events, such as assault, aggravated assault and harassment. The underlying context of spousal violence is less visible, but I would venture to say that it is more harmful than what is visible.

To enforce that, as my colleague said, police officers and prosecutors need to be well trained. In Quebec, the issue of coercive control has already been added to the directives of prosecutors in criminal and penal prosecutions. So that is already something they have to take into account when they analyze a case before deciding whether or not to lay charges.

It's certainly an additional tool for charges to be laid, but beyond that, criminalizing coercive control also sends a message that helps people who are experiencing coercive control recognize it. Society, police and prosecutors must recognize this, of course, but the people who experience it must also be aware of it.

Criminalization brings these things out into the open. It can help victims realize that what they're experiencing is really domestic violence and that their partner isn't just exercising control. Including this element in the Criminal Code also has that effect.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: That is something we should keep in mind and consider in our report on femicides.

If I recall correctly, the CAVAC Network was one of the contributors to the Quebec report that examines supports for victims of sexual and domestic violence, "*Reb tir la confiance*". The report was produced by the National Assembly, and the criminalization of coercive control is one of its recommendations. However, knowing that this is not the responsibility of the Quebec National Assembly, Quebec members are asking the federal government to take action.

We are currently studying Bill C-332, which paves the way for making coercive control a crime. Why is it important to pass the bill?

• (1715)

Ms. Karine Gagnon: It's important for the reasons I mentioned. As you say, only the federal government has the power to include that offence in the Criminal Code.

In Quebec, as I mentioned, this is already part of the directives our prosecutors receive. Coercive control is taken into account in the analysis of case files, but it cannot be admitted into evidence or used as a charge. It is therefore important to criminalize it so that specific charges can be laid everywhere in Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very good.

Next I will welcome MP Kwan. You have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for their presentations.

I'd like to build on the issue of rural versus urban differences, which was touched on in the presentations.

By way of stats, if you look at 2021, you see that the rate of gender-related homicide in Canada was two and a half times greater in rural areas compared with urban areas. By way of provinces, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta are the leading provinces faced with the gender-related homicides of women and girls. The stats get even more stark as you get deeper into it.

I would like to get your advice and knowledge about recognizing the differences between rural versus urban communities, and what needs to be done. What does the federal government need to do to support, in particular, the women and girls in rural and remote communities who are facing horrific attacks?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I'm based in Ottawa, but I'm from small-town northern Ontario. I not only research this but I've also lived this.

Yes, less than 16% of Canadians live in rural, remote or northern communities, and yet they represent about half, if not sometimes more than half, of femicides in this country.

Isolation is a problem for all victims of intimate partner violence. However, when you live on a back road and you are 40 minutes away from the local OPP detachment—as was the case for Nathalie Warmerdam, who was killed in Wilno—confidentiality is a problem. If everybody knows everybody else, can a victim trust accessing victim services if victim services also plays hockey with her abusive husband?

It's firearm access. In my family, growing up, we all had firearms. I'm the only person in my family who doesn't hunt. I'm a vegan. I grew up with firearms in my home. I was never afraid of them, because I grew up in that context. However, if I lived in a violent home and knew there was a .22 in my basement, it would give me pause if I decided to leave.

Additionally, it's transportation. All of the train tracks going to northern Ontario have been ripped up. Greyhound has left the country. There are very few flights, even. If you're living in a rural community, there's no public transit. You need to have a car and gas, and you need to have access to that car on your own in order to leave. Where will you go?

Lastly, how we fund services is a problem in this country. We fund on a per capita basis, not understanding that while there might be more people in Toronto than Renfrew County, it's more expensive to serve clients in Renfrew County. That might seem like a provincial issue, but we need a federal conversation about how we decide who gets funding. Just looking at population density ignores that it's more dangerous and expensive to live in small-town Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I'd like to touch on this as well. I'm from British Columbia, and we have northern communities and the Highway of Tears, of course. You touched on transportation. A lot of indigenous women and girls cannot access transportation. As a result, we are seeing some of those devastating numbers showing up.

Central to the question of transportation, would you recommend that the government put in a national transportation strategy for rural and remote communities so that women and girls facing violence have an ability to access transportation to safety?

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: Maybe I'll jump in here.

I love that idea, but I think this is a difficult reality. When we talk about gender-based violence and risk, particularly in rural and remote communities, we have to think about things like a transportation network and infrastructure. I know that's not quick and easy funding, but these kinds of solutions are needed to meaningfully address and bring down the rates of gender-based violence. It's about things like housing, travel infrastructure and child care. All of these issues keep women, primarily, stuck in these situations, because they are facing a much more difficult road by leaving than in staying in a situation that's known to them.

I know that's always hard, because it doesn't feel like low-hanging fruit. However, it's essential that we think about the broad picture to really make change.

• (1720)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that.

I understand that sometimes solutions are hard and cost money. However, the lives of women and families are valuable. If we don't invest, take these steps and make a plan to realize them, they will never be done. Then, 30 years later, we'll be talking about this again. That cannot be acceptable.

I think a sign just went up. Is it one minute?

Okay. I'll ask this very quickly and maybe build on it in my next round. I want to talk a little about culturally sensitive services.

Back in the day, when I was a community legal advocate, I met with women who faced violence and had nowhere to go because the services they were trying to access were not culturally sensitive or did not have the language capacity to meet their needs.

I wonder if you could share your knowledge and expertise and speak about that aspect. I have 30 seconds, so we might have to come back.

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: Okay, I can jump in here and say that this is an extremely important point. You need to make sure that your services are accessible for everyone. For example, I know that in our community—I'm from Hamilton—our women's shelters and sexual assault centre have access to over 250 languages for interpretation. That's one piece. That's a very small but important piece, because we want to be able to communicate with the individual. We need to ensure that a cultural lens and competency exist in those spaces so that we are not making assumptions and are addressing the unique needs of those survivors walking through the door. There is no one-size-fits-all answer.

Again, just to echo what Ms. Lalonde was saying, I'll say that these services can be more expensive. When we look at bean-counting and the price per person, these kinds of services to meet the unique and diverse needs of survivors across Canada are essential, but they may be more expensive.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you.

Next we have MP Vien.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vien, over to you for five minutes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today. We are very pleased to have them.

Ms. Lalonde, you said in your opening remarks that you've trained 50,000 Canadians.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I would say it's even more than that.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: That's a lot of people.

Ms. Lalonde, can you explain to us what kind of training you designed and provided to these people? What objectives were you pursuing, or are you pursuing if you still do it?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Yes, I still do training on a daily basis.

I teach bystanders and people in the community that they can play a role in building supportive communities. Most of the time, I work with people aged 12 and over, but I also have a program where I work with children aged three to 10.

We talk about the role that bystanders can play among the people around them and what they can do when they witness violence, harassment or hate. We then provide them with ways to respond.

I'm a very optimistic person. However, what I see every day is that most people want to do the right thing without really knowing how to go about it.

For example, what can you do if you see that your neighbour is being abused by her boyfriend? You don't want to make it worse, you don't want to put your neighbour at risk and you don't want to put yourself at risk. We propose a continuum of actions that can be taken. They could be direct or indirect, depending on the circumstances.

We talk about different methods, such as the 5 Ds. The goal is to help people realize that they have power and that they can do something. They need to be provided with tools.

That's really my role. I train people.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: That's good.

How does that work? Do you put up posters in specific places? Do you advertise? Do people come to you?

• (1725)

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Because I've been doing this work for a long time, I often act as a spokesperson, and people ask for my services.

The problem is that people don't know the training exists. That's really what's missing.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: It reminds me a bit of what we call sentinels. More and more community services are being developed in our rural areas. Sentinels go and knock on the doors of seniors, for example, to ask how they are feeling and make sure everything is fine.

Ms. Gagnon, Ms. Ferreri spoke earlier about Bill C-75, which was passed. It allows violent, abusive men to get parole. We realize that this happens often. Mr. Betts also talked about it earlier. He would even like to see the legislation amended.

Do you see cases like this on a daily basis? Does it happen that, when women come to tell you what they are going through, you realize that they are victims of men who should be in prison or who have a history of violent behaviour?

Ms. Karine Gagnon: We do see that on a daily basis.

Sometimes charges have already been laid. Afterwards, either the offender was released on a promise to appear following a police investigation, or he was detained and released after a bail hearing.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: After they are released, do men ever commit another act of violence against the women you help?

Ms. Karine Gagnon: Yes, it does happen. People often fail to comply with the bail conditions imposed on them, unfortunately. This is not anecdotal. These are not isolated incidents.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Can I assume that, like Mr. Betts, you would like to see the legislation reviewed?

Ms. Karine Gagnon: Yes, that could be one possibility. That said, we have to consider another factor. You may find it strange for me to mention this, since our mission is to work with victims of violence, not the perpetrators.

When the police intervene, it tends to be unsettling for perpetrators of violence. This is no ordinary day for them. It is a good time to direct them to resources that can help. It's very important to do that, because it is impossible to put all perpetrators of violence in jail. It's not going to happen, unfortunately, because there are too many of them. In addition, the criteria for keeping a person in detention are not always met.

The police need to use the intervention to refer perpetrators of violence to help services. It has to be done quickly, and they should be subject to rigorous follow-up.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you.

My time is up.

[*English*]

The Chair: Lisa—MP Hefner—you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hefner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. You can call me Lisa. That's no problem at all.

Thank you so much to all the witnesses for being here.

Lenore, we go back decades. I think you were always my go-to expert on gender-based violence. You've led Hamilton in this area for so long. I feel like I have too. I covered a lot of criminal court. I think about Holly Hamilton all the time. I watched her car get towed away with her body inside. I think about Tania Cowell. I think about all the things I saw and heard during those trials. It breaks my heart to this day.

Julie and Lenore, you've both spoken about bystander training. Even with all my experience and even with personal experience with this, I have seen incidents of domestic violence in the streets

and I've hesitated to intervene or do anything because I'm afraid of making the situation worse for the woman.

What's your advice? How do we move forward as bystanders to support other women?

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: Thank you so much, Lisa, for your kind words.

I think there are many things we can do. I think the biggest thing is helping people learn about the things they can do. As Julie mentioned, bystander intervention has a five-D approach. We don't have time to do the bystander training today, but there are excellent resources and literature on how we intervene so that we don't escalate it. You're right that we don't want to make things more dangerous for the woman.

I think there have been some promising prevention campaigns. For example, Neighbours, Friends and Families was seeking to intervene and teach those skills to community members. I certainly know that on campus at McMaster University we work hard so that students can try to figure out how they can navigate these situations and also not get themselves harmed. We want no one to have any further harm because of our interventions.

It sounds maybe a bit boring, but it's about education. It's about making those services and programs available for people so that they can learn and so that they know that it is all our problem. This is not a women's issue; this is an "us" issue. I think it really, truly, takes all of us to end gender-based violence. We can make a difference with our interventions.

● (1730)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Julie, when we're talking about stalking, this committee has just finished studying coercive control. Our government is looking at legislating against coercive control. Would you consider stalking a form of coercive control? Would that be covered under this legislation?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Not entirely, no. There are changes we'd like to see to the Criminal Code around criminal harassment, but that wouldn't necessarily be covered by coercive control legislation.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Lenore, in all your years, have you seen a change in reporting in terms of the number of women who are more likely to come forward? Have you seen a change in awareness about gender-based violence?

I know that you said the laws have become better but that the situation has become worse. Can you give us more insight into that?

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: Yes, I can, absolutely. I can say this from a stats perspective but also from my lived perspective of having worked with survivors.

We know there are waves of information and awareness. I can talk about #MeToo. Things dramatically changed after the #MeToo movement, when we had so many more survivors of sexual violence in particular coming forward. We could start talking about things that we weren't talking about as a community and a culture. I know there are waves of change.

I know that domestic violence is much more commonly reported to police and that folks are coming forward, but we also know that the vast majority of folks still do not talk or tell anybody about this. We know that this is one of the crimes that is increasing. Despite other violent crimes decreasing, femicide is increasing. That's a scary trend.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I don't know if we have enough time, Julie.

I've been following you for many years on social media, and I thank you for all of your work.

You've also faced enormous hate and attacks on social media. Can you talk to us about what sort of real-life impact this has?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I'll go very quickly.

I can't speak in public without a security detail, even though I'm just a random lady from Canada. I'm a white woman with a Canadian passport who receives an enormous number of death threats for trying to talk about violence against women in a Canadian context. You can just imagine how folks who don't have the privilege I do are not speaking.

That's one of the more difficult things to measure—the collective silencing of people. They see someone like me being threatened and think, “I would never want to be in her shoes. I'm not as protected as this woman is, and she's being treated this way.” We need to recognize that this has a tremendous impact on our ability to even talk about these issues.

When my colleagues from White Ribbon are speaking, for example, and it's a little spicier than what I'm saying, they get, “Thank you so much for talking. It's great that men are talking about this.” Then I'll say something so banal compared with what they did, and I need to be escorted back to my car.

I'm a tremendously privileged person, so we need to think about who is not able to be in my chair because it's not safe enough for them to speak. That's a problem you should all be concerned about.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: It doesn't stay online. You're physically—

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Yes, I've had people threaten me to my face at events and—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: It goes off line very quickly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is MP Larouche. You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Lalonde, for the work you are doing to raise awareness. Your answer to the question about violence is very helpful.

I'm going to go back to the issue that Ms. Hepfner raised about online violence. I will turn to you, Ms. Gagnon and Ms. Huet, to find out what you're seeing in the CAVACs, or crime victims assistance centres.

We are looking for ways to combat femicide. However, at the end of your last response, you addressed the issue of prevention. What tools can we use to raise awareness and prevent online hate, so we can say when misogynistic speech has gone too far?

What are the repercussions of influencers, people who belong to the incel movement and others making online comments that fuel misogyny? Ultimately, doesn't this lead some men to adopt increasingly violent behaviours, even to the point of femicide?

• (1735)

Ms. Karine Gagnon: Actually, prevention and awareness are not part of the CAVAC mission, which is to intervene once the damage has been done, unfortunately. However, we can see that social media and the hate speech it spreads certainly contribute to violence against women.

That said, it is also a manifestation of something that exists and is openly espoused on social media. Hence the need for prevention and awareness. We need to dismantle the thinking that leads to these behaviours being perpetuated.

The imbalance in male-female relations obviously goes way back. Still, I would say that things are changing slowly but surely.

We feel that legislation to control this kind of online speech could certainly help reduce violence. It would also send a clear message that this kind of speech and this view of women are not tolerated in our society.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Kwan, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I'd like to turn my two and a half minutes to Ms. Huet and Ms. Gagnon.

Given your experiences with the CAVAC program, what would you say are the top recommendations or lessons learned that the federal government can take away from the program? If you can frame that by way of recommendations for this committee, I would really appreciate it.

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Huet: Is the question for me?

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, it is to both of you.

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Huet: I'm not sure I understood the question.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm just asking this: What would you say would be the top lessons learned that we could take away from from your experience in the delivery of the program in Quebec and in the delivery of the Crime Victims Assistance Centre?

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Huet: The pressure should be taken off the victims. I want to come back to what my colleague Ms. Gagnon said. It's important to look at what can be done about perpetrators of violence. Those within the justice system should also be given more power to stop perpetrators of violence.

Coercive control could be included in the Criminal Code, but action should also be taken with respect to conditional release. The people who work in the justice system should be given more power to intervene in certain situations. Too much of the onus is still on victims. They need to file a report, explain everything, find all the information and give it to the authorities.

That's what my experience would suggest.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Is my time up?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Well, maybe I can turn back to the folks over here.

On the same question, what would you say is the number one recommendation?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I can't speak to the Quebec context, but if you mean in general, we need to change the law around criminal harassment in Canada. We have recommendations to change the law. Specifically, the criterion that you have to prove that you are afraid for your safety is too subjective. It's not working, and it relies on sexist tropes of how women demonstrate fear. It needs to change, and it can change. That's my recommendation.

• (1740)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just like that, MP Roberts, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm going to start with both Julie and Lenore, if I can address you. Thank you.

You made a comment earlier about 86 recommendations. I'm going to get back to that in a minute on a couple of notes, and then I want to ask the chief of police a question as well.

I met with a community group from York Region called CC-SYR. One of the things they do is to have individuals from other countries come to a group that does all different kinds of things. They knit. They do yoga. Some of these women come, and in the beginning, their husbands have to come with them because they have to monitor them, and when they see that it's just knitting or whatever, then they leave them and say that it's a safe place for them. It's not until that happens that these women feel the opportunity to speak with some of the counsellors about the abuse, because they do not realize what laws we have in this country. A lot of the seniors who go there are still experiencing this issue of violence.

You both said earlier that there were 86 recommendations. Lenore, you said that you were at this committee 10 years ago. What has changed?

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: That's a big question, and I don't have very much time.

I want to follow up with what you're saying. What you said about the group you just talked about really struck me. When I worked at the sexual assault centre in Hamilton, we ran a sewing circle. We ran six or 12 at a time because they were a safer space for women, and they were run in 10 different languages, so they were language-specific. I remember thinking that this is going to be hard to justify to our funders, but I knew that this was what we needed to do to bring women in.

I love that you.... I just needed to say that because I think we need to think outside the box.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: The reason I bring this up is that we had meetings on coercive control, and one of the witnesses made a statement that shocked me.

Her husband had repeatedly tried to beat her and poison her. When she had him arrested, her father told her—these are her words, not mine—to go and get him released from police, because she was bringing shame to the family. When she said that he would kill her, her father's response was that he'd rather see her carried out in a body bag than shame the family—so there's a culture situation there that we have to address.

Chief Betts, do you feel that “catch and release” is a bad situation for women? In Ontario, of 444 municipalities, 94 have reported an increase in this situation. That amounts to just over 300,000 women. That's 300,000 women. Do you think catch and release is not helping women stay protected?

Mr. Stuart Betts: I'm going to say yes. I think it isn't helping Canadians to stay protected in many instances. For the purposes of this conversation, yes, it often results in a heightened sense of risk and danger.

As we've just heard, an accused who's been sent to jail will be released on bail or through some form of release. On top of what was already a tense situation, he's now angry. He's now embarrassed. He may feel a loss of power and a loss of control. We suddenly find that there is a heightened risk to the victim and the person who's made this complaint. We are stuck with trying to help with managing for safety programming. The police provide safety programming and provide emergency contact phones; it's not enough.

So the answer is yes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you for that.

Julie, I'll go back to you.

Do you feel that if your perpetrator had been left in jail, where they could probably have given him some counselling, although I don't know if it would have helped, you would have been better protected instead of his being released?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: He was never even arrested, so there's that.

I mean, absolutely we can talk about bail conditions, but let's talk about the threshold that we're actually using. He was 19 years old. He'd never been in conflict with the law before, so the police said he was not threatening. They acknowledged that what I experienced was harassment, but they did not think it was threatening.

I can't even talk to you about bail, because we're not even arresting people, let alone rehabilitating them and let alone—

• (1745)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Would you say that one of your recommendations to ensure the safety of all women and for you to feel protected would be to maybe allow....

As the police chief just said, as they come out, they're more angry and they're going to retaliate on the woman. In terms of your recommendations, would one of them be to maybe assess them and keep them in jail a little longer until you can get a safe place?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Yes, but I also want to look at what we're doing with these men when they're incarcerated.

The idea is that people don't die in jail in this country; they come out. What are we doing to actually rehabilitate abusers? That's where I would love to see the conversation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roberts.

At this point, we have Emmanuella for five minutes, please.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here to discuss this with us.

Ms. Lukasik-Foss, I want to push a little bit on what MP Roberts asked. You didn't really respond to the second part of that question, and that was actually where I was headed. You did mention that there's been an increase in the last 10 years. Not only has there been an increase; while we've seen other crimes decrease, femicides have increased.

I'm wondering what factors you think may be contributing to this.

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: I didn't get a chance to answer, so thank you for bringing it back to that conversation.

We know that the factors that keep women stuck in dangerous and abusive and violent relationships have gotten worse. Those are things like affordable housing; access to stable jobs; access to child care, although there have been some improvements in communities; transportation; and just difficulties in life. We know, particularly postpandemic, that things feel very hard in communities. We know that a lot more women are remaining in situations in which they're experiencing abuse, because the alternatives feel very, very hard and scary, or else alternatives are not available.

When I worked at the shelter and we had to turn women and children away, we were devastated. This is a normal thing now. We know that hundreds of women are turned away every day in shelters, so I think people don't want to leave. That's why it's worse. I think things are very difficult for everybody right now, and that will impact survivors.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

Around that, what would be your top recommendation?

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: It's hard for me to say a top recommendation, as there are so many things.

Implement the five pillars of the national action plan. I know those are not exciting things to hear, because they're expensive and not low-hanging fruit.

Also, there's the gender-based violence commissioner. It's such an important role, because it will create accountability. Nobody wants extra layers sometimes, but I think we have the answers. Let's get it moving. That's what I think.

In 30 years.... I know it probably won't end in my lifetime, but I want to have hope for my children.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you so much.

Madame Lalonde, you mentioned that you would make changes to the Criminal Code around criminal harassment. I'm wondering what changes these would be, specifically. You spoke a little bit about education and about making sure that people are aware of what their rights are, but what in the code would you change?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Thank you.

I actually wrote down the specific recommendation from the femicide inquest, because that's exactly it. What they and I recommend is this:

Undertake an analysis of the application of s. 264 of the Criminal Code with a view to evaluating whether the existing factors adequately capture the impact on survivors. Consider the removal of the subjective requirement that the action causes the victim to fear for their safety.

In short, to prove criminal harassment, I have to prove that it is unwanted, that it is repeated, and that it makes me fear for my safety. Where it falls apart is with regard to the fear for their safety, because we have multiple cases in which women were seen to be angry towards their abuser, and that was used to say, “Well, if you were angry, you weren't scared.” It literally comes down to a subjective idea of how a woman demonstrates fear: She cowers or she cries. If you don't do that, if you stand up for yourself—which is what we tell women to do—that could actually backfire in a Criminal Code context.

What we want to see is changing that piece of “fear for your safety” to “impedes your ability to go about your daily life”, which is measurable. I had to change my shift. I had to move. I had to change my locks. I had to add all of these pieces. It makes it much more difficult for a justice to argue that you didn't really seem scared if you had to change all of these things about your life.

It's an easy, easy fix that will literally save lives. It's so easy to do this.

• (1750)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you so much. I appreciate both of your answers.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: To the policeman, you said that femicide should be in the Criminal Code, that it should be a crime in the Criminal Code. You said that it's because it would be considered a hate crime. When we talk about hate crimes, we're talking about how the person has hatred towards a community or a group of people, I would imagine. That's what I have seen in terms of hate crimes. I don't know if there's a specific definition—there probably is—but I don't have it at hand here.

However, with regard to most of the victims we've been discussing today, it's really motivated by a lack of control over the person after the person has left a situation, a relationship. Is there any nuance there that we can capture? Does that fall within hate crimes?

The Chair: Sadly, we are already about 30 seconds over. Since we're already a little bit over, perhaps you could try to encapsulate an answer to that in another opportunity when you have to answer. I'll stick to one minute and 30 seconds next time.

We are beginning our third round.

Michelle, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

There has just been some really powerful testimony and really strong recommendations from all of our witnesses on IPV, intimate partner violence. It's a very important discussion. It's hard to open up news and not read of another attack. It's become normalized, sadly.

Ms. Lalonde, I really appreciate your recommendations on changing the Criminal Code in terms of criminal harassment, in terms of stalking. The fact that your attacker was never even arrested is pretty shocking to hear. Thank you for putting that on the record.

Ms. Lukasik-Foss from McMaster University, is there any data on the increase in the cost of living and an increase in domestic or intimate partner violence?

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: That's an excellent question.

I don't have the research at my fingertips, but we know intimate partner violence cuts across all socio-economic classes. Folks at all levels are experiencing domestic violence.

However, we also know that if you have lower financial resources or housing resources, things can get worse. We know that if an abusive person loses work or is dealing with other kinds of stressors, it can increase the violence that's already there. For example, during COVID, we had more calls to domestic violence shelters and heard from more victims.

When things get worse, we know this violence increases. I don't have the research in front of me, but I know it.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: If there is data you want to table, we would love to have it. I think it's very valuable for this conversation.

You touched on something that I think is very important in getting at the heart of the policy. We are the federal government in this room. It has to come down to a policy for what we're going to do. There are all kinds of different things, like culture, but if we don't change legislation, nothing happens. When you see not enough housing, record-breaking numbers at food banks and crime increasing exponentially after nine years of this government....

Ms. Lalonde, you said you brought forward these recommendations. You sat through, probably, one of the most horrific triple femicides in the history of Canada. When you read what this man is, “monster” isn't the correct word. There's a psychopathic something there. That's why I would love to have a psychologist testify on this. There's that aspect.

Why have your recommendations never been implemented?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I will say that the federal government responded better to our femicide inquest than the provincial government. The folks at this table were more open to those recommendations than my premier was. There is some room for joy, frankly.

However, yes, it's a problem. That man first committed domestic violence in 1985, the year I was born. Thirty years later, he killed three women. Nobody in the community was surprised. The police themselves knew he was a risk to the community.

I want to address something, because I too sat there and thought, “What a monster.” I want to give a shout-out to Malcolm, who is the son of one of the murdered women. He was part of the inquest, and he was very clear in saying, “That was somebody’s son. He was a human being. He was allowed to be that way.” We can absolutely have a conversation around the psychology of people who commit those crimes, but he was a human being who was clearly set down the wrong path. No one corrected his behaviour for 30 years. That scares me.

• (1755)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: You're an incredible person.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Thank you.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: You touched on a point that is so much bigger when we pull it out. A lot of people watching this study are writing to me, because it's impacting so many. They say, “Men are also victims.” Okay, let's have that honest conversation. If we keep teaching women how to be defensive but we are not teaching boys how to be good, we have a serious problem.

I'm going to end it with Chief Betts.

The last round of questioning I had with you was on the children who are recognizing this. From what you see as a police officer, Chief Betts, can you give us an example of how intimate partner violence escalates and how it often, sadly, ends in murder?

Mr. Stuart Betts: Chair, through you, if I'm understanding correctly, we have seen an escalation in violence this year, at least in my community, in relation to intimate partner violence. For example, so far this year, we've had three attempted murders in relation to that, while we had zero last year. We've had 11 incidents of firearms being used in intimate partner violence. That's up from four last year. We're seeing a cycle that hasn't changed. We've seen a significant increase in assault with weapons causing bodily harm, which is up from last year.

I think you're onto that cycle of violence we spoke about in the first round. How do we intervene? How do we stop it? It's one thing to put a point on it right now, in terms of Criminal Code offences, bail and sentencing, but if we don't get down to prevention among the people perpetrating it or who may be likely to perpetrate, it doesn't matter what we put in to this end; we're not going to break that cycle of violence. Sadly, I think we know what happens if we don't put those pieces in place early.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

Thank you, MP Ferreri.

Next, we have Marc. You have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here. They've given us a lot to think about.

Thank you for your comments, Ms. Lalonde. I know that you come from a rural area in Sudbury.

I would like to ask you about victim services. At the last meeting, Ms. Walker and Ms. Alexander talked about them. They said

that there was intimidation and a lack of resources. They also said that prosecutors don't really work for victims.

Earlier, you said that there was still some confusion about the respective roles of the federal and provincial governments. You touched on some of the things that Mr. Ford said. Also, a lot of the witnesses don't want to talk about the role of the provinces. I completely understand that, since it is not up to victims to say which level of government is responsible.

That said, I would like to hear your assessment of the services provided to victims through the courts and prosecutors. I would also like to hear your comments on the roles the federal and provincial governments play.

What recommendations would you like to share with the committee?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Education isn't just what happens in schools. The federal government can intervene in a number of ways. It can launch ad campaigns and programs to raise awareness. It did that during the pandemic. When it was deemed a crime to share intimate photos of someone without their consent, the federal government raised awareness about that.

It's commonly thought that the provinces have to be the ones to address the problem, but that reflects a very narrow view of education. Broader education initiatives such as awareness-raising campaigns provide another tool. I definitely think the federal government has a role to play in that regard.

• (1800)

Mr. Marc Serré: Educating the public, men and boys, is one thing, but training judges, prosecutors and police is another consideration. They are part of the system, which seems to have some major problems.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I completely agree.

Mr. Marc Serré: What about education or training efforts on that front?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: There isn't enough focus on that. I completely agree that those within the justice system need more training, prosecutors, police officers and the like.

The government should make training mandatory for them. You shouldn't be allowed to be a police officer if you can't recognize what constitutes domestic violence. You shouldn't be a prosecutor if you don't know the kind of trauma victims experience or how that trauma affects their testimony.

To me, that's self-evident, but there is a lack of awareness and education. It's the government's job to change that.

Mr. Marc Serré: We've heard the stories of many victims of violence. The opposition thinks that putting the perpetrators in jail is the only solution. You brought up prison overcrowding, the horrible conditions in prisons, the lack of education for prisoners and the fact that they come out worse than they were going in.

I can understand why victims and a certain political party would say that the solution is to put people in prison, but it's not always that simple.

The police chief talked about the catch and release situation. He said that providing victims with support isn't a straightforward process.

How can we address that?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: It is important to keep in mind that prisons are gender-specific. Take, for example, a man who goes to prison for being violent towards a woman. He's in jail with other men. Since he doesn't have an opportunity to rape or abuse a woman, he'll eventually be found to have good behaviour.

Prisons are gender-specific for a reason. However, it's crazy to think that putting someone in jail is going to change the attitude of a man who exhibits sexist and violent behaviour towards their wife or spouse.

In the prison environment, it isn't possible to see how these men behave towards women. The prison system can't help these men because it doesn't provide them with any education or training about violence against women. At the end of the day, people whose behaviour in prison is deemed acceptable are released into the community. That is inevitable because there are no women in their immediate environment, so they don't behave how they normally would in a different environment.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: That was too quick, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Sorry, your five minutes is up.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Andréanne, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Again, I'd like to thank the witnesses for their very insightful comments.

Ms. Gagnon and Ms. Huet, I'd like to talk about potential solutions you could recommend. The Quebec department of justice recently launched an education campaign on sextortion via text. The campaign did not go unnoticed. We applauded the government for this great initiative to raise awareness. We know that ad campaigns are important for raising societal awareness. We talked about that. You also talked about online hate and making coercive control a crime.

I'd like to know what other ways there might be to address the problem. Quebec is currently piloting an electronic bracelet program. The use of electronic bracelets was a recommendation in Quebec's "*Rebâtir la confiance*" report. The Quebec government is also piloting a specialized court for crimes involving sexual and domestic violence. You mentioned the rapid response, or intervention, units as well.

Do you have any thoughts or suggestions to share about the rapid response units or any of the pilot projects Quebec has introduced?

Ms. Jackie Huet: First, it's clear that co-operation works. Last week, I saw a prime example of that. It was a situation where, because solicitor-client privilege had been waived and because there had been communication with people in the justice system, actors who had power were able to do something.

Risk assessment is another element. It's part of what the stakeholders I mentioned earlier do, the liaison socio-legal workers. The fact that CAVACs, or crime victims assistance centres, have case-workers who are trained to really assess the risk victims face has made a big difference. It paved the way for a safety-based approach with victims, an approach that Crown prosecutors can then implement.

My colleague Ms. Gagnon may have more to add.

• (1805)

Ms. Karine Gagnon: The stakeholders who are part of the rapid response units can intervene in high-risk situations. We often say that each person who works with the victim knows only a piece of the victim's story. That is why it's important to have a structured way of working together to put all those pieces of the story together and quickly put an effective safety net in place.

It's a model we feel should be applied to the entire country. Confidentiality is a roadblock organizations like ours often run into, but the model allows for confidentiality to be waived. My colleague just referred to the fact that it's appropriate to waive solicitor-client privilege in high-risk situations so that important information can be shared.

The rapid response units are made up of police officers, youth protection branch representatives, probation officers, CAVAC case-workers, people from other victims support services and shelter representatives. They have the power needed to move quickly in order to keep victims safe.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Kwan, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I'd like to focus these two and a half minutes on the issues around prevention and rehabilitation. We touched on it a bit. I wonder if we can get some further specific preventive and rehabilitative actions you think the federal government can undertake to address this.

That's for our two witnesses here today.

Ms. Lenore Lukasik-Foss: I'll start things off.

I'm going to focus on the rehabilitation piece, because I feel that so far I've heard a lot of conversation about the criminal justice approach—locking them up, and the bail issues—when we know the vast majority of survivors don't access those systems. Even in femicides, we find there may not have always been previous police involvement before the death, so I think it's essential that we take a different approach and actually work with folks who are at risk of becoming abusive, recognizing that there is a continuum of violence. We know that if someone's on a path, that path is going to go down a very difficult road and that we need to have interventions. Right now, we don't.

We tend to think primarily of men who do this as monsters or as “other”, but everyone in this room may know someone who is engaging in this kind of abusive or coercive behaviour when we look at the statistics. It is our friends, families and neighbours who are doing this. We need to have ways of creating new social norms that make this super not okay to do and to give people tools to call out their friends, family and neighbours to deal with this situation and to look at transformative justice and restorative justice.

Most people, and definitely in the university context and the students I work with, do not want to have criminal involvement. They are looking for alternative systems. I would love to see a robust program being developed in these areas. I know it's nuanced, but we can do it.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I would just add that it's deeply unpopular to fund work with perpetrators and sex offenders. It makes people uncomfortable: “Why am I taking money away from this cause to give it to a child molester?” It's because that will actually keep us safer, and I think we need to have the courage to have the difficult but important conversation about why we need to invest in rehabilitation.

Wife-beaters, to be blunt, do well in prison because there are no wives to beat. They're not actually being rehabilitated. They're being told, “Look at you. You were wonderful. Your behaviour was fantastic, so we're letting you out early.” There's no recognition of how this isn't just an animal who's violent on a whim. There was a clear motivating factor of misogyny that allowed him to behave that way. That's not currently integrated into our current corrections system. It would be wonderful to see.

To Lenore's point, finally, during the #MeToo movement in the last few years, we did a tremendous amount of work talking about who could be a victim but a poor job of talking about who can be an abuser. I would love to see some real, honest conversations about that.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much. I just want to say how much I appreciate both of you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vien, you may go ahead for five minutes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to make something clear. The Conservative Party believes in rehabilitation, but we have a bit of trouble with the idea of letting criminals out on bail to sit at home while they wait for sentencing.

We also believe in the importance of a thoughtful process and discussion focusing on young boys, the way they're raised, the things they're told and the cultural biases that shape their thinking.

I felt it important to make clear that rehabilitation is very important to my party.

As you know, ladies, a very sad anniversary is coming up in Quebec. By my count, we're coming up on the 35th anniversary of the École Polytechnique massacre, in which highly talented young engineering students were killed all because they were women. Back then, in 1989, I was the same age they were. It's always upsetting as December 6 draws near.

Ms. Lalonde, you spoke about the need for an awareness campaign.

On your end, Ms. Gagnon, do you think that will do anything? I realize it's not the only tool, but is awareness and education helpful?

Ms. Karine Gagnon: Awareness campaigns are certainly another tool to educate people about coercive control, perpetrators and victims alike. As was mentioned earlier, victims don't necessarily realize that that is what they're experiencing.

Consideration should also be given to campaigns aimed at educating those who witness these kinds of situations, to encourage them to do something. Ms. Lalonde brought that up when she was talking about the types of training she provides. We think the way people who witness these acts of violence react can play a key role in supporting victims.

It's important not only to give people tools, but also to run ad campaigns to encourage them to take the appropriate action.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I don't want to speak for the committee, but I think I know you well enough to know that you would agree with us about the importance of giving family members tools. In many cases, they see things and they know what's going on.

Ms. Karine Gagnon: Yes, it's very difficult for family members. You're right.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: They hear things, but they're reluctant to say anything.

Ms. Karine Gagnon: They don't want to suddenly confront the person. They don't want to lose their trust. It's very important not to lose the person's trust.

Certainly, that's an avenue that should be explored.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'm sure I'm running out of time.

Ms. Ferreri talked about children and violence. Oftentimes, women leave with the children and go to a shelter.

Ms. Gagnon, when it does happen, how long does it take to repair the damage done? How long does it take for a woman to put herself back together, if you will?

Ms. Karine Gagnon: There isn't just one answer to that question. It really depends on each person's journey. It can depend on the risk factors and the wherewithal each person already has to protect themselves.

Some victims are able to recover and move on, while others suffer the effects their entire lives. Some people experience post-traumatic growth in a very positive way and even come out better for having gone through what they did, although it may sound odd to say. There isn't a single answer I can give you.

I do want to make a point, though.

Earlier, we talked about children who witness violence and the victims. Children aren't witnesses. They are full-fledged victims of the violence being perpetrated. They aren't merely witnesses to the violence. Even if the violence isn't directed at them, they live in a climate of violence and they are victims who are directly affected.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. Gagnon, I got the feeling that you were treading very carefully earlier when the potential for perpetrators of violence to change their behaviour came up. I want to give you an opportunity to follow up on that.

I'm not sure what your exact words were, but you said that a perpetrator's attitude can change when police enter the picture. What we are seeing, what police are telling us and what the statistics are showing is that, in many cases, the violence in question goes beyond a single offence, beyond a single act by a violent person.

What you're saying today is that when police come into the picture, it often has the effect of reining the perpetrator in.

Can you talk about that?

• (1815)

Ms. Karine Gagnon: I'm not saying that it reins the person in. I'm saying that it's a point in time that can be unsettling for the perpetrator. It puts them in a unique situation and provides a good opportunity to refer the individual to resources that can help. If memory serves me correctly, the Longueuil police department, in Quebec, has such a process.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Yes, that's exactly where it is.

Ms. Karine Gagnon: Police departments have resources to support victims. We work with police departments, and they too have resources for victims of violence.

However, it's also important to use their involvement as an opportunity to refer perpetrators of violence to appropriate resources. As was mentioned earlier, putting them in jail isn't just going to fix everything.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: The experience in Longueuil you're referring to, Ms. Gagnon, also concerns human trafficking.

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up.

[English]

MP Lisa Hepfner, you have the last five minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to direct my next question to Chief Betts. It might take me a minute to get there, though.

When you started out, you talked about how you didn't like Bill C-75 and would like to see changes to it. We know Bill C-75 reverses the onus so that the accused has to prove to the justice of the peace, in most cases, that he should be let out on bail. It also forces justices of the peace to take intimate partner violence into consideration as an aggravating factor in a bail condition.

I'm wondering what you would change in there. Is it how justices of the peace interpret an existing law what you're really concerned about, in fact? For example, we heard at this committee that a lot of JPs don't want to send an accused to jail because provincial jails are overcrowded. That's where you go when you're on bail: provincial jail.

The National Police Federation recently released a bunch of recommendations for provinces that include more data collection and sharing on intimate partner violence and bail in order to better inform the people who make bail decisions. They include recommendations for bail enforcement monitoring systems and for justices of the peace to have standard qualifications before they're appointed to the job. We know that right now they don't need to have any legal experience in order to serve as a justice of the peace.

Perhaps you could comment on that. What specifically about Bill C-75 would you change, or is it that you don't like how it's being implemented in the system?

Mr. Stuart Betts: Thank you.

Chair, through you, there were quite a few points in there. I'll try to get them all for you.

To start, with Bill C-75, I think the application of the particular legislation right now is difficult. We know that release from custody is a ladder principle and that the least onerous form of custody is to hold that person accountable for their behaviour while they're awaiting a trial, and that is what we are letting people out on. Often, that is perhaps underserving victims in our community because the least onerous, depending on the nature of that offence, is insufficient to protect our community once they've been released.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Just to reiterate and just to underline what you said, it's the application of the law; it's not the law itself.

Mr. Stuart Betts: I'm sorry. It is the law itself as well, because it is how it's currently being applied but it is also the law. What it doesn't allow us to do is to jump to the top rung, which may be the most appropriate for the crime that has happened. That is what we used to do.

What we've done now is essentially flipped it on its head, and we are now letting people out of custody whom we wouldn't have let out of custody prior to that. Is there an overcorrection? Probably there has been an overcorrection as a result, and that's why I said that I'd like to see that particular piece of legislation modified.

I believe that the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and many of the police associations have all signed on to that. It's not to say that people shouldn't be let out; it's just to say that this particular piece of legislation needs to be amended in order to allow for a better application.

I think we agree on the data sharing. There is insufficient data sharing with regard to intimate partner violence across jurisdictions, and even within our own provinces and across borders. If somebody has not been charged, then the likelihood that they will appear in a database that's accessible to another police agency is next to nil, so there can be people who move from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and as we've heard, within rural jurisdictions there's a particular risk to people who are there, and there's a lack of resources.

What was the other question you had?

• (1820)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: It was about standard qualifications for justices of the peace, for JPs.

Mr. Stuart Betts: I absolutely agree that there should be some standard qualifications for justices of the peace. We often find that police officers are trying to provide just the most basic of education when we're dealing with JPs.

I spoke earlier with regard to hate crime, for example. There is a Criminal Code definition. We do have a definition for hate crime, and if we have to explain that to a justice of the peace, we're losing the momentum, and oftentimes we don't even have the opportunity to do so. There are a lot of nuances at play here.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: I appreciate that, Chief. Thank you very much for your insights.

I'm wondering if Julie or Lenore want to weigh in on the bail system or anything else, or if you're good. I know the chief is the expert, so if you don't want to weigh in, that's totally fine.

The Chair: At this point, you are out of time, and that does conclude our panel.

However, I certainly would like to recommend—and I encourage this—to any witnesses who were posed questions and didn't have the opportunity to answer them in the time provided to please send us information on anything you were not able to answer. The committee would certainly welcome that information.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of the witnesses, both online and those of you in the room, for your sensitive testimony this afternoon. Thank you again for that.

To committee members, prior to adjourning, there are a few housekeeping things that I would like to touch on. It's currently 6:25, so we do have a few minutes. It's with regard to our next study.

In the meantime, those witnesses who are in the room are invited to stay for the last five minutes and watch some housekeeping, or you can excuse yourselves if you wish. Again, thank you.

Members, with regard to our next study, the study of violence targeting the 2SLGBTQI community, we will need to submit witness lists to the clerk by Thursday, November 7. Are we comfortable with Thursday, November 7, for witnesses to be suggested to the clerk?

The Chair: It's the study of violence.

Mark it on your calendars. I'm not seeing anybody disagreeing with me, so I will affirm that Thursday, November 7, is the deadline for submitting witnesses for our next study, the study of violence targeting 2SLGBTQI.

With regard to the news release, does the committee agree that the clerk and analysts of the committee, in consultation with the chair, prepare a news release for publication on the committee's website at the start of the study and upon presentation of the report to the House?

I'm seeing consensus there.

If the group would like to see a draft for review prior to publishing, I'm happy to do that as well, or I can just go ahead.

Okay. I see agreement. Thank you. I'll go ahead with that.

Next, with regard to deadlines for the public to submit written briefs, there has been a little bit of leniency with regard to briefs over the last couple months, but we need to be consistent for our clerk and analysts. We want to be able to get the information we need, but we need to ensure that it is a maximum of two pages. That's 1,000 words. We're looking at Monday, December 2, at 4 p.m. I will be firm with that—Monday, December 2, at 4 p.m. There has been some leniency, but we'll be firm with that so that we're able to keep moving forward.

Finally, with regard to mental health support for witnesses, does everyone agree that we again offer those supports to witnesses on this study moving forward?

An hon. member: Absolutely.

The Chair: Okay. Arrangements will be made.

Two witnesses who were not able to join us today because of some technological difficulty will be joining us on Monday at our next meeting. We will have a full panel of witnesses. We can update that, just so you're aware of who's coming.

Seeing no other business, is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: What study are you referring to?

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