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Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman



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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number 129 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 all comments ought to be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for adhering to these rules.

[*English*]

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

Before we welcome our witnesses, I'd like to provide this trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence and femicides. This may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If any participants feel distressed or need help, please advise the clerk. For all witnesses and for all members of Parliament, it is important to recognize that these are very difficult discussions, so let's try to be as compassionate as we can with our conversations.

For today's panel, as individuals, we have Diane Tremblay, artist. We have Alison Irons, and we have Lucas Broadfoot joining us by video conference.

From National Family and Survivors Circle, we have Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, chair. We also have, from Pauktutit Inuit Women of Canada, Rosemary Cooper, president and chief executive officer, joining us by video conference.

From Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, we have Louise Riendeau, co-responsible for political affairs by video conference, and Mathilde Trou, co-responsible for political affairs, who is also joining us by video conference.

In addition, we have Melanie Omeniho, president, Women of the Métis Nation by video conference as well. We also have Humberto Carolo, chief executive officer of White Ribbon by video conference.

We will begin our statements of up to five minutes per organization and five minutes per individual.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Tremblay, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Diane Tremblay (Artist, As an Individual): Hello.

My name is Diane Tremblay and I am a victim and survivor of domestic and family violence.

I am here today to offer my full support, experience and vision; as a former victim myself, I am also here to stand in solidarity with other victims, most of whom are women who are dealing with violence. I would like to offer my support to indigenous women, who are overrepresented among these victims, and to women of all backgrounds. These women are human beings targeted and used as scapegoats by anger-fuelled men. These men are power-hungry and filled with an unholy hatred for women.

As you know, the number of femicides has increased dramatically, even more so since the pandemic. We deserve resources from qualified organizations right now, such as psychological and financial assistance, as well as accommodation and assistance during court appearances. Police forces often have their hands tied by laws that are designed for criminals, not for abused women. I've lived it, so I speak from experience.

Unfortunately, the huge lack of resources, staff and budget is hindering assistance for women victims. We're here today to find solutions quickly, because criminals don't wait. They kill spouses, mothers, daughters, grandmothers, aunts and friends, among others. These women don't stand a chance, because they're not being adequately protected and taken seriously by our federal and provincial governments. Help has been slow in coming for decades. We are left with the impression that women remain at the bottom of our leaders' priorities in 2024, with the exception of yourselves, of course.

I myself have been a victim of domestic violence. During this difficult time in my life, I experienced sexual assault and two attempts on my life. Myself and my children were subjected to all forms of violence. In addition, I had to fight tooth and nail to keep myself safe and to get financial and psychological help. This was way back to 2009. Nearly 20 years later, I am still making the same arguments and begging for change. That is not normal, it is immoral and unacceptable.

Here's what I propose as solutions.

First, we should have programs in every school in Canada to teach our children and equip them with the skills to communicate, manage their anger and respect others. A mediation program should be available in every school to help children with behavioural difficulties. We could call upon survivors of violence, who would be properly trained to offer anger management and child victim support programs. This would serve as an immediate intervention that would help victims from a young age. It would be beneficial to both victims and children and would truly help children make the transition into the adult world. Prevention is a key word that we tend to forget.

In addition, there should be meetings and discussions with judges in each of the provinces. That would be beneficial for everyone. We should be holding hearings with victims, as we are doing today, at least every two years, so that they can make their needs and feelings known outside the courtroom. Of course, I'm talking about survivors whose cases have been resolved. In short, it takes face-to-face meetings.

This could also be done with police services and their chiefs, so that they have a better understanding of victims and are in a better position to help them. That would be a big step toward better crisis management for victims of assault. What I mean by that is that police officers often don't know what to do either. Survivors of violence could then provide their expertise. I'm talking about survivors that would be able to participate with the benefit of some hindsight. When you are in a state of shock or going through a healing process, it is too early, in my humble opinion, to have clear ideas and to manage your emotions in a healthy way. When we give talks or appear before committees to explain our point of view, as I am doing today, it helps police officers better understand us when such events occur.

• (1105)

Obviously, much remains to be done in our society in general. There is a great need for education and awareness on violence against women. We could hold annual focus groups or information sessions with key workers or survivors in city halls during public meetings. Women's safety is everyone's business. It's about targeting violence without putting yourself in harm's way.

I think that murderers do not recognize the extent of their actions and that many of them have no remorse, too blinded as they are by their need to control, get revenge and hold the power of life and death over women.

As women, we find ourselves on our knees begging our abusers to spare our lives, not to hit us or rape us. We are still kneeling before our governments and begging for protection and security. We've been doing this for decades. This has to stop. Some people talk the talk and some walk the walk. Women are the ones who walk the walk. It is time for governments to act right here right now, but when will we see words put into action?

Finally, I think it would be appropriate to have an ambassador representing abused women. She could keep a constant eye on the situation and contact our elected officials in all the provinces of Canada to remind them that we exist, that we are entitled to respect and that we have the right to lead our lives without being controlled

by a violent man, under the threat of a knife or a gun. We have the right to live safely in our homes.

Thank you for listening to me and hearing me, and I wish you wisdom and good luck in your initiatives.

Meegwetch, thank you.

• (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony.

I would like to welcome Ms. Alison Irons. Please go ahead.

Ms. Alison Irons (As an Individual): Forgive me if my introduction is repetitive from last week, when my Internet dropped. I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me to speak again today.

By way of introduction, I'm an ex-RCMP officer of nine years' service who attended many so-called domestic disputes during my service. I was also at that time on the board of the North Shore Women's Centre in North Vancouver, B.C., as a police adviser. I'd like to point out that this was some 40 years ago, and here we are still.

I've also worked as an Ontario government investigator and investigative manager for Ombudsman Ontario, particularly in the field of corrections. I retired as a director of enterprise-wide services in the Government of Ontario. Further, I'm certified as a Canadian human resources leader.

Sadly, I'm also the mother of 26-year-old Lindsay Margaret Wilson, born July 30, 1986, my precious daughter and best friend, who was stalked and shot to death by her ex-intimate partner, a legal gun owner who had guns and a licence he never should have been granted, in a murder-suicide on April 5, 2013, in Bracebridge, Ontario, just two weeks before completing her graduating exams. I received her degree at Nipissing University posthumously.

I want to emphasize to the committee that my daughter's assassin—yes, that's what I call him—had never been violent with her until the day he murdered her in cold blood. He was clean-cut, articulate and from a well-to-do family of professionals in the community in which he lived. He was also manipulative, artful and controlling with my daughter in a number of ways. He'd tell her she was the love of his life, but would undermine her self-confidence by constantly criticizing her looks, her weight—when she was slim, not overweight—her clothing choices, etc. She left the relationship twice when she caught him drug dealing behind her back. That was another manipulation, as he was not the person he purported to be.

The first time, he lured her back with letters articulating his love for her, his apologies and the inevitable promises of changed behaviour. Occasionally, he threatened suicide by firearm to keep her with him. We must understand that threats of suicide to keep someone in a relationship are a form of coercive control, since they terrify the recipient of the threats. She kept these from me initially, sadly, as she knew how I'd react.

He also incessantly held over her head the matter of an \$85 phone bill he claimed she owed him. My daughter, a principled person, didn't agree that this money was owed. She also strongly believed that since she had unwittingly been duped into paying many of the costs in their relationship, she definitely owed him nothing. Since drug dealing had been his only income, he didn't want to pay for anything in cash. I even offered to give her the money to pay him so that he would stop harassing her about it, but she refused on principle.

In January 2012 he threatened to commit suicide by firearm over three hours on the phone with her after she'd caught him drug dealing again and had broken off the relationship for good. She severed all contact with him. He then kept trying to contact her through blocked-number phone calls, through friends, through social media and through letters he wrote to her again professing undying love and that it was all his fault, but still adding content to undermine her self-esteem. He continued to bring up the phone bill.

She read me the final letter about three weeks before her murder. There was no hint in the letter of any threat or of his escalating anger towards her, but I pointed out to her how manipulative, deceptive and undermining the letter was. In one sentence he'd praise her. In the next sentence he'd find fault. We were afraid to get a restraining order, because I knew as an ex-police officer that its service on him might be the very thing that tipped him over the edge into violence. I also knew that if he showed up at her door with a gun, it would be too late to get help.

We also thought at the time, incorrectly, that his driver's licence was suspended and that he couldn't reach her five hours away. But he did drive five hours. He found her car and stalked her that week to find her home. He surprised her with a shotgun in the driveway. While she pleaded for her life, he shot her with both pellets and slugs at close range, centre body mass—a clearly fatal injury. She survived for only about 20 minutes. Police told me she was in shock and in no pain, but that she knew she was dying. That's horrific for a mother to learn.

• (1115)

I've been lobbying for a criminal coercive control offence since I learned England and Scotland had done this, and have monitored how such cases have been faring in the U.K. justice system. It's clear that police are indeed laying the charges. In fact, to date, there are over 1,000.

However, it's now emerging that too many are failing in court because judges and defence counsel are arguing, but he didn't hit you, did he, so it couldn't have been that bad? It appears they don't understand the legal definition of coercive control as non-violent behaviour of the accused towards the victim.

This demands the education of the criminal justice system regarding coercive control as an absolute necessity in implementation of that bill, as was done in Keira's law. Abused women are at greater danger of harm if such charges fail in court because personnel don't understand the intent and meaning of the law. Monitoring of charges and convictions initially must also ensure there's no adverse impact on identifiable groups, such as indigenous persons or people of colour.

Finally, I firmly believe, as an ex-police officer, that a conviction for coercive control in one's criminal history will serve as an evidentiary building block to corroborate any future pattern of behaviour that might progress to violence, or worse, femicide.

Thank you for listening and for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony.

I would like to welcome Mr. Broadfoot.

You have the floor for up to five minutes.

Mr. Lucas Broadfoot (As an Individual): Good morning.

Today, I stand before you not just as an individual but as a voice for my sister, Breanna Broadfoot, whose life was tragically cut short by domestic violence this summer. It is a privilege to address you in this esteemed chamber where the issues that shape our nation are discussed and resolved.

Breanna was a vibrant spirit full of dreams and aspirations whose potential was extinguished far too soon. Her story is a reminder of the countless individuals affected by the scourge of domestic violence, a pervasive issue that touches every corner of our society.

Breanna's story is not just her own. It is a reflection of countless lives disrupted and destroyed by domestic violence. My sister's abuser was let out on bail after an incident in March. My sister was strangled and beaten until she didn't look the same. I was the one who had to get her from the bus stop, and I'm the one who called the police. He was let out the same day after just getting his fingerprints done. He also had a heavy record of violent crimes. He was charged with strangulation with intent to kill.

At our last discussion, it was disheartening to hear the response from the Liberal Party, which dismissed domestic violence as a non-issue. This response was not just disappointing; it was a stark reminder of how domestic violence continues to be marginalized despite its devastating impact on families and communities across Canada. Domestic violence is not a distant concern or an abstract issue. It is a crisis that affects real people—our friends, our family, our neighbours—yet the reality remains that criminals and abusers continue to roam our streets, often without facing the accountability they so clearly deserve.

This lack of consequence emboldens offenders and leaves survivors feeling isolated and unprotected. It is clear that we need to address this issue with greater urgency and commitment. One crucial step forward would be the implementation of comprehensive domestic violence education in our schools. By integrating domestic violence awareness and prevention programs into the curriculum, we could foster a generation that understands the signs of abuse, knows how to help and where to seek help and stands firmly against violence in all its forms. Educating our youth about the dynamics of domestic violence will not only empower them to protect themselves but also help cultivate a culture of empathy, understanding and respect.

Furthermore, it is imperative that we enhance support systems for survivors and ensure that justice is not just a theoretical ideal but a practical reality. We must work towards creating a robust legal framework that holds abusers accountable and ensures that survivors receive the protection and support they need. This includes addressing the gaps in our legal system and ensuring that those who commit acts of domestic violence and violent crimes are not left to continue their harmful behaviour unchallenged.

My sister's memory calls us to action. It is a call to fight against the normalization of violence and to demand better for all who suffer in silence. Let us honour her and all of the other countless victims by taking decisive steps to address domestic violence through education and reform. Let us work together to create a society where everyone, regardless of their circumstances, can live free from fear and harm.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Lucas, for your sensitive testimony. You were extraordinarily brave.

I would like to welcome Ms. Anderson-Pyrz.

You have the floor for up to five minutes.

Ms. Hilda Anderson-Pyrz: Good morning, Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Hilda Anderson, and I am the chair of the National Family and Survivors Circle, which is made up of families who are impacted by missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and survivors of gender and race-based violence. Thank you for this opportunity to address the ongoing crisis of gender-based violence and femicides in Canada, especially as it impacts indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

This is a human rights crisis, a Canadian genocide, as the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls identified, rooted in systemic racism, intergenerational trauma and severe social and economic marginalization. Let me be clear, indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people are not statistics. They are individual human beings with inherent rights: the right to safety, the right to dignity and the right to self-determination. Addressing this crisis is not a partisan issue. It is a human rights obligation that demands unwavering cross-party commitment. The solutions must outlast political cycles and be backed by sustained concrete action and the political will to see this through.

The National Family and Survivors Circle is guided by four pillars—inclusion, interconnectedness, accountability and impact—that must shape Canada's response. Today, I present three key actions that are essential to ending this violence.

First, we need rigorous accountability mechanisms backed by political will. Policies without accountability risk becoming hollow gestures. Canada must establish a national accountability framework with legislatively mandated impact assessments, timelines and progress indicators to measure and track effectiveness; and annual public reporting that provides clear measurable data on progress, funding allocations and outcomes specifically for indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people with feedback from the indigenous community on what is truly working.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has issued recommendations to Canada on addressing gender-based violence. These are urgent and necessary guidelines. The 231 calls for justice, however, are legal imperatives that are not optional. Canada has a binding responsibility to uphold these calls and ensure they lead to meaningful change. Embedding accountability in legislation is the only way to ensure these obligations are upheld permanently and not subject to shifting priorities.

Second, equitable funding must prioritize indigenous-led initiatives. To make a real difference, sustained and equitable funding must be directed to indigenous-led organizations where indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people hold decision-making roles. I urge this committee to support legislated commitments for sustained, equitable funding focused on indigenous-led initiatives, ensuring that solutions are created and guided by those with lived experience, and predictable multi-year funding models to allow indigenous organizations to plan, grow and provide stable culturally relevant services for their communities. Equitable funding acknowledges the right of indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people to lead in addressing the challenges they uniquely face.

Third, indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people must be leaders in policy decisions on gender-based violence. The four pillars of inclusion, interconnectedness, accountability and impact mean that indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people must be at the helm of designing, implementing and overseeing policies that affect them. This includes mandating their leadership in policy-making bodies as essential partners whose expertise and experiences are invaluable, centring their voices in policy planning and strategy, and ensuring that solutions are rooted in their cultures, values and realities.

Finally, we must legislate trauma-informed, culturally safe services that are guided by indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. This requires legislated standards for trauma-informed and culturally safe support to guarantee respectful, effective services that respond to the unique needs of survivors. It also involves education and awareness programs led by indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people to increase public understanding of the colonial and systemic roots of gender-based violence.

In conclusion, this committee's study on gender-based violence and femicide is a vital opportunity for Canadians to take definitive, lasting action.

- (1125)

The National Family and Survivors Circle is calling for nothing less than an end to femicide and a commitment to a future where indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people live in safety, security and dignity. This is not a goal. It is our responsibility to uphold their right to live free from violence and discrimination.

I urge each of you to champion these actions and recommendations to ensure that this work is sustained beyond political cycles and remains a legacy of justice that transcends partisanship.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Anderson-Pyrz.

Next, we will welcome Ms. Cooper.

Ms. Cooper, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Rosemary Cooper (President and Chief Executive Officer, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada): Good morning, Madam Chair, committee members, guests and staff.

Ullaakkut, Chair. My name is Rosemary Cooper, and I'm the CEO of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. Pauktuutit is a national representative organization of Inuit women, girls and gender-diverse Inuit in Canada. We advocate for their needs in health, violence and abuse prevention, justice, social and economic development, equity and self-determination.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on femicide specifically as it impacts indigenous women and gender-diverse people in Canada. You may be expecting Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada to focus solely on Inuit women described in our experiences, the trauma we continue to face and the statistics of violence against us, but we've done this for decades and have found that knowing how and why Inuit women are targeted isn't enough.

Across the Americas, femicide has long been used as a term to describe the targets of politicized killing of women and girls by in-

stitutions and states, including forced disappearances. It is important to make these links, because we are talking about purposeful, instrumental targeting of women and gender-diverse people because of who they are.

Following the inquiry of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, the Government of Canada accepted the finding of genocide, and it is this intersection that we want to focus on today. We often hear calls to listen to Inuit women, but are Inuit women being heard?

Today we need to focus on the other side of this conversation: the inaction and the lack of priority and investment to end this violence and the systems that allow this violence to continue without adequate intervention, prioritization or accountability for those responsible. The national inquiry into MMIWG offered valuable findings, but it didn't provide sufficient data to give a full picture of the violence that Inuit women face. Key data held by the RCMP remains unreleased, restricting our understanding of the true scope of this violence. We demand that this data be released to national indigenous women organizations immediately. The government has accepted the inquiry's findings of genocide, but acknowledging this genocide must be matched by concrete action.

The sixth convening of the Trilateral Working Group on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls was recently held in Mexico. Our board chair, Nancy Etok, and all our indigenous women continue to raise the issue of inaction of the governments in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

When we talk about femicide and the violence against indigenous women and Inuit women, we must acknowledge that this violence is political. As Inuit women, we live the personal as political every day in ongoing settler colonies. At the intersection of colonialism and patriarchy, where men typically hold the authority and privilege, indigenous women are targeted not by chance but because erasing us strengthens settler power. This is not accidental violence. The systems we live within were built on the dehumanization of indigenous women. Ending this violence demands the same intention that went into creating these systems.

• (1130)

We've seen major commitments on paper, but let's talk about the actual investment. The national inquiry into MMIWG was originally funded at \$53.8 million, with a later investment bringing it to \$92 million. Yet in the same year, \$2.6 billion went toward innovation and research.

MMIWG essentially received 3.5% of the investment into the innovation budget. Since 2021, Canada has allocated \$29.5 billion in investment for small businesses, the green economy and AI startups, while indigenous communities received \$2.2 billion in broadly spread funding that didn't directly address the MMIWG crisis.

In the same period, only \$125 million was directed to MMIWG-specific initiatives, and only two out of the 231 calls for justice have been fully implemented. This disparity reflects the significant gap between the commitment to economic development and the urgent need for targeted action to address violence against indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. What is our priority? What message are we sending to indigenous and Inuit women, girls and gender-diverse people, and to those who perpetuate this violence? By these numbers, we're saying this is not a crisis. This isn't genocide; it's business as usual.

We continue to add our voices—

• (1135)

The Chair: Ms. Cooper, I would kindly ask you to finish your thoughts. We're about two minutes over. Thank you so much.

Ms. Rosemary Cooper: In closing, there are calls that can be immediately implemented now with real investment.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Madame Riendeau and Madame Trou for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau (Co-responsible of Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting us today to speak on this serious issue.

Our association represents 46 help centres and shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence. These shelters are situated all over Quebec. Since the beginning of the year, there have been 20 femicides in Quebec, 12 of which were committed by an intimate partner.

Domestic violence, also known as coercive control, is a social problem linked to relationships of inequality that have long existed between men and women. It is this type of domineering relationship, which some men fundamentally subscribe to, that leads to domestic violence and, ultimately, femicide. Fortunately, there are solutions to combat violence against women. Here are a few.

One is training. In Canada, as elsewhere, women are most likely to be murdered at the hands of a current or former partner. Contrary to popular belief, intimate partner femicides are among the most predictable murders. Also contrary to popular belief is the fact that

femicides are not necessarily preceded by physical violence. However, coercive control is systematically present and is at the heart of violence. Surveillance through technology, harassment, isolation, jealousy and threats, among others, which are all manifestations of coercive control and continue beyond a breakup, are red-flag precursors to femicide.

A good risk assessment ensures that a safety net is in place before femicide occurs. It is therefore essential that workers from legal, health and social services, who are often on the frontline dealing with abused women and children, be trained and equipped to properly recognize and assess the risks. To do so, governments must provide the necessary financial resources for training to be offered to all these stakeholders. It would also be useful for the government to take stock of the tools and practices that exist to assess the risks associated with domestic violence and to determine best practices in this area.

Another solution would be to criminalize coercive control. Better protection for women and children would require the passage of Bill C-332, which criminalizes coercive control. It would send a strong message to victims that more subtle but equally devastating forms of violence and control are now recognized by the justice system. This would have the effect of speeding up training on assessing the risk of spousal homicide for anyone working with female victims of domestic violence. If the bill is passed, police will be able to document coercive control and prosecutors will be able to take it into account throughout the prosecution. We urge the Senate and the government to pass Bill C-332.

I'll now turn it over to my colleague.

Ms. Mathilde Trou (Co-responsible of Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): However, femicide prevention cannot be achieved without specialized domestic violence resources. In Quebec and other provinces and territories, resource centres and shelters are running at full capacity and often struggle to meet requests for help from women, who have to wait several weeks before getting services.

Shelters must also turn down requests from community stakeholders, including schools, to give awareness-raising presentations. However, it is important to make children aware from a very young age of the importance of equality and the absence of violence in romantic relationships.

The federal government has a role to play by ensuring that shelters and resource centres have a budget that is commensurate with their intended mission. Funding could come from the first two pillars of the national action plan to end gender-based violence. Funding has already been allocated under these two pillars, but the amounts are insufficient and have not been renewed.

In addition to setting up a strong network of resource centres, shelters and transitional housing here in Canada, we should also be launching public awareness campaigns. We see tangible benefits for victims and their loved ones after every campaign. These campaigns also raise public awareness.

Finally, there is the issue of housing. We would remind you of the importance of access to affordable housing for abused women. According to representatives of our member shelters, three out of four women they support have trouble finding housing that would allow them to break free from their abusive relationship. The inability to find such housing after the breakup is a central concern for victims, but it is also one of the reasons behind the lack of space in shelters. Women are staying in shelters longer because they can't find a place to live. The time for action is now, because housing is also a safety issue for these women.

In conclusion, we hope that these meetings will lead to a better understanding of the underlying causes of femicide and violence against women, as well as the measures that must be taken to fundamentally change attitudes and behaviours to ensure better protection for women and girls in Canada.

Thank you for listening.

• (1140)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you both very much for your testimony.

I'd like to welcome Ms. Omeniho. You have five minutes.

Ms. Melanie Omeniho (President, Women of the Métis Nation): Good morning, everybody. Thank you for giving Les Femmes Michif Otipimisiwak, LFMO, the time to speak to the committee today on this topic of gender-based violence and femicide against women, girls and gender-diverse kin.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you today from Treaty 6 territory and the motherland of the Métis Nation.

LFMO is the national indigenous women's organization whose mandate is to represent Métis women from across the Métis motherland. We advocate nationally and internationally for equal treatment, health and well-being of all Métis people, with a focus on the rights, needs and priorities of Métis women, youth, children and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis kin.

Data shows that women and girls experiencing oppression based on race, ethnicity, age, religion, ability, region, gender identity and sexual orientation are disproportionately targeted. Métis women and girls are especially vulnerable. Nearly four in 10 cases involving marginalized Métis women or girls are impacted by mental health struggles, substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, the street economies, histories of violence, intergenerational trauma and/or previous child welfare involvement. Perpetrators exploit inequity and oppressive conditions, targeting marginalized women and girls.

We have some recommendations to end femicide, intimate partner violence and all forms of gender-based violence.

The utilization of language that describes the reality of what is occurring is an important first step. Using the term “femicide” is a step forward. It demonstrates solidarity with indigenous women in Mexico and Latin America who have long spoken out against gender-based killings amidst systemic corruption and inequity. Canada's adoption of this term will highlight a shift in acknowledging gender-based violence as a systemic issue.

It is also an opportunity for government researchers, advocacy and survivor groups, and feminist anti-violence agencies to collaborate with indigenous women's organizations like LFMO and Pauktuutit, which have shared an interest in tracking violence, understanding the trends and engaging prevention strategies. Partnerships with indigenous women's organizations are essential for tracking violence, understanding the trends and engaging these strategies that are going to help change this.

The term “vulnerabilization” was introduced by an indigenous sister from Mexico during the 2023 trilateral working group on violence against indigenous women. It reflects Métis and other indigenous women's and gender-diverse kin's realities in Canada, emphasizing how structural inequalities create conditions of violence. It also shifts focus from individual or community risk to structural factors and enabled risk. The term recognizes that poverty, racism, homophobia, colonialism and ageism are exploited by perpetrators. It underlines that perpetrators weaponize systemic inequalities to target marginalized groups.

Current laws allow Crown counsel to request judges to detain innocent crime victims for up to 30 days to compel testimony. This is a practice that can retraumatize the victims and contribute to a higher risk of violence, self-harm and suicide. Immediate legislative reform is needed to prevent treating victims as criminals, including practices like incarcerating victims alongside their perpetrators.

A dedicated network of Métis justice system navigators is crucial for guiding Métis individuals through the legal process, connecting them with trauma-informed, culturally safe supports and ensuring access to specialized courts like mental health courts.

Culturally grounded victim services and transitional supports for youth who are aging out of care are also essential to mitigate the impact of system neglect and to improve life trajectories for Métis people involved in many of these systems. System navigators support Métis women, children and 2SLGBTQIA+ kin by ensuring programs are developed with a culturally based, gendered and intersectional framework that addresses unique vulnerabilities such as intersecting identity factors.

- (1145)

This approach includes providing age-appropriate, culturally sensitive education and resources on topics such as healthy relationships, safe dating and gender-based violence.

LFMO, along with all orders of government, should develop a media campaign to correct the misconceptions about people. This campaign should focus on addressing historical discrimination and systemic factors that increase vulnerabilities for indigenous women and children by promoting awareness through a strength-based narrative that emphasizes identity, resilience and pride.

We advocate for an allocation of funding for public education campaigns that highlight the unique experiences of women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ kin, emphasizing the impacts of racism, sexism and colonization. Focus should be given to community-focused implementation of reconciliation activities aimed at reducing racism and building safer, more vibrant communities, through fostering understanding and respect for various perspectives and intersectional experiences.

One piece that keeps falling on the shoulders of indigenous women is the concept of us fixing our men and boys. It is not our responsibility to heal the perpetrators who've impacted our lives and to fix non-indigenous males who've inflicted several harms on us. We strongly recommend that fixing men becomes a man's issue and not a woman's issue.

In closing, we call for the following awareness and action: use the term "femicide", acknowledge the systemic nature of femicide and its impact on these marginalized communities, support initiatives that address structural inequalities contributing to gender-based violence and femicide, and commit to fostering collaboration with indigenous and marginalized communities to advance prevention and protection services.

The one last thing that I'd like to say is thank you to all the witnesses who came here as survivors and family members of victims to be able to tell us their story today.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony as well.

Our last witness this morning is Mr. Carolo.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Humberto Carolo (Chief Executive Officer, White Ribbon): Good morning.

First of all, it's a real honour to be with all of you today.

Ninety-nine per cent of perpetrators of sexual violence toward women and girls are men.

Ideologically motivated violent extremism now has its own category of gender-based violence, with 75% of profiles belonging to boys and men.

Boys who are bullied are overrepresented in misogynistic, hate-fuelled mass murders, and research has shown that online communities that promote radical extremism are directly linked to real-life violence.

Unchallenged bullying in boys leads to men who assault.

Ninety per cent of all sex extortion victims are boys and young men.

My name is Humberto Carolo. I'm the chief executive officer at White Ribbon. I am a member of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces' external advisory group for the Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre. I'm also a member of the Ontario Government's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee.

I am based in Toronto, on the traditional territory of many indigenous nations, including Anishinabe, Huron-Wendat, Seneca and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Today, I'm appearing as the CEO of White Ribbon, a Canadian charitable organization that engages men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence.

It's important to point out the stark realities that exist for men and boys, and the impact of those realities on women and girls and gender-diverse people. Sadly, we continue to socialize our boys and men to be prone to perpetrate violence, and then wonder why our collective efforts aren't reducing the rate and prevalence of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence and femicide are issues of prime importance to me, professionally and personally, as I have dedicated my professional life to its eradication. As a boy and young man, I grew up with this violence, watching the women I love experience that violence at home and in my community. I am an adoptive dad of three young men who lost their birth family to poverty, addictions and domestic violence. I stand in solidarity with those of you who have been directly impacted by this violence, and I pledge to support your calls for justice and action.

Another way of life for men and boys is possible. White Ribbon's vision of our future is one free of all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. This isn't a theoretical or idealistic goal but one that is absolutely achievable within a fully resourced, long-term, multi-faceted prevention plan that focuses across the lifespan.

Findings from Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee coroner's inquests have repeatedly shown that gender-based violence is not only predictable but also preventable. Yet, primary prevention is significantly underfunded. In our 33-plus years of existence, White Ribbon still does not have core funding. Primary prevention saves lives. It heals. It changes people's life paths. It creates new societal expectations of acceptance, non-violence and equity. It focuses on the root cause—the unhealthy socialization of men and boys.

Gender-based violence is perpetrated almost entirely by men, young men and boys who were taught, enabled and, in many cases, victimized, traumatized and moulded over countless generations to adhere to attitudes, behaviours and social norms of unhealthy masculinities. These intergenerational life lessons inform how men and boys act in the world, and our society's expectations of them. However, we can create a better future.

A long-term multi-faceted prevention strategy is needed, one that reaches into our homes to help men accept accountability, to develop the skills of healthy relationships and to benefit from fatherhood and role model programming. It also offers healing support to boys and young men who have witnessed violence.

We need our schools to equip them with strength-based positive programming to foster resilience and capacity in boys and male educators. We need our sports to promote healthy masculinities, equity, safety and respect for women, and the fair recognition of women in sports. We need to change the deeply entrenched, sexist, hyper-masculine norms, views and attitudes of the online toxic ecosystems and to inoculate against the harmful influences through building resistance, reducing a person's tendency to support the ideology, and reducing the credibility of deeply misogynistic and hateful influencers.

• (1150)

Extensive school resources, parenting education and social media campaigns are needed. Our workplaces need to implement best practices of male allyship, bystander intervention education, training for management and staff, and a holistic approach that supports survivors, enhances policies and utilizes public education campaigns.

Our communities need to offer community-based programming that teaches and role-models healthy masculinities at each stage of development for boys and young men. We need our social norms to help boys and men to increase their emotional IQ, enable them to understand and adhere to equity values, develop strong skills in empathy and compassion, and normalize healthy masculinities.

I started this speech with some pretty jarring statistics to demonstrate the gender aspect of who is perpetrating this violence. Primary prevention efforts that focus on changing social norms in men's and boys' attitudes and behaviours are the exact way we change our culture, so that gender-based violence stops and is not carried on by the next generation. It's the formula for creating our future free of gender-based violence.

Let's confine gender-based violence and femicides to Canada's history and create the world we all desire for ourselves and for generations to come.

Thank you very much. *Meegwetch.*

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you all for your sensitive opening remarks.

At this point we will begin our round of questions. We do have a rather large panel today, so I would ask all members and witnesses to be very mindful of the time. I was a little bit lenient during the opening remarks to make sure that every witness was able to express their thoughts. Just be mindful of that, so we can have a robust two rounds of healthy dialogue. Thank you.

Dominique, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for making yourselves available today to share your thoughts with us.

Ms. Tremblay, welcome back to the committee.

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Thank you for inviting me back.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. Tremblay, in your testimony, you said that the laws were designed for criminals.

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Yes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: You also said that you had to fight for your safety. Let's go back to your tragic story. You were a victim of domestic violence for a number of years. How many years was it?

Ms. Diane Tremblay: The violence lasted a number of years, nearly seven years.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Was your spouse out on parole at any time?

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Many times.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Tell us your story, please, because witnesses have spoken about the current laws that allow violent men, repeat offenders who are at large, to commit crimes against their partners. Remind us then of the context in which your spouse should have been in prison but was rather set free.

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Absolutely. As you know, I'm an artist, a singer, a speaker and a writer, so I lead a fairly public life. Actually, I was only able to do that once I left my partner.

There were posters all over the place showcasing me as a multi-disciplinary artist. Every time I showed up for a gig, even at a restaurant, he was there. He followed me for a long time. When I called the police, there were many occasions, at least seven or eight, when they would take him back to the station, give him a warning and release him. So I had to put my career on hold and apply for social assistance, because I had nothing left to support me financially. He was never kept in jail unless it happened on the weekend. In that case, he was kept in prison for two or three days. Otherwise, he was released under recognizance. After being found guilty for breach of probation, he spent two weeks in prison, which is not much, the equivalent of a slap on the wrist.

The authorities wrote to me saying that he had gone through three or four therapy sessions. Do you know how many therapy sessions I had to go through to get my life back? In his case, however, they made it sound as if he had been cured with a wave of a magic wand.

A year and a half later, I read in the newspaper that he had beaten another woman for four hours. I was horrified.

• (1200)

Mrs. Dominique Vien: If I understand correctly, he did the same thing to another woman.

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Yes, he did the same thing to Patricia Coutu. I found Ms. Coutu on Facebook. When I went to see her, I took her hand and told her that she was no longer alone, that I was going to help her get through this.

When my ex saw me, he was shocked. Even though my case was closed, I asked the presiding judge to remind the accused of the details of my case. I asked the judge to do this that because my ex claimed that he had never been violent before. For once, a judge accommodated my request.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Ms. Tremblay.

Ms. Diane Tremblay: You're welcome.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I have very little time, but I'm sure my colleagues will come back to this.

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Okay.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. Riendeau, welcome and thank you for being here. You are no stranger to the committee, and we are very happy to see you.

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Hello.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: You heard Ms. Tremblay's testimony. This isn't the first time we've heard that.

Last week, we heard from the chief of police of Peterborough, Ontario, who told us that the problem was not in enforcing the law, but in the very wording of the law. The law is lax, and sentences are lenient. The men are at home watching TV. The bail conditions are ridiculous. I see that the women who have come to testify are nodding their heads in agreement.

What changes should be made to the legislation? The women you welcome in your 46 transition houses and shelters have likely told you stories similar to Ms. Tremblay's.

Ms. Louise Riendeau: One potential change would consist in taking into account all the manifestations of violence and control experienced by women. That is why we are actively advocating for the criminalization of coercive control.

Police officers often tell us that they have no leverage to act, that they see that it doesn't work, but that they can't invoke any offence to act. However, if coercive control were criminalized and could be taken into account, as is the case in Great Britain, we could have better penalties for acts committed against women. Also, at the time of prosecution, there could be a better assessment of what they are experiencing and the risks they are exposed to.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, MP Hefner, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hefner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses for their testimony here today. I'll go quickly, because we are short of time, and I'll start with you, Mr. Carolo. Thank you so much for your testimony.

The national action plan to end gender-based violence is more than half a billion dollars rolling out across the country. All provinces and territories signed on last year, and they have a lot of latitude in how they want to use that money, except 25% of it has to be for prevention. And to me, that's a lot of the work that you're doing.

Could you talk about the impact and why we need to support those types of efforts?

Mr. Humberto Carolo: If we want to prevent this violence from happening at its roots, we need to absolutely focus on early intervention, education and engagement. We must absolutely focus on engaging directly with boys and young men, and also with men who are using violence. That means intervening earlier in the process.

I need to share with you that laws and tools like that are not sufficient. We must work on helping men better address their conflict, their anger, their traumas and their own resentments because men coming out of these sentences, conditions and restrictions are often even more angry and even more resolved to enact revenge and use violence. That is very problematic. It means that what we are trying to do to prevent the escalation of that violence is not working well.

We need to do things differently. We need to work with those men using different kinds of approaches.

I would agree that three sessions of counselling is not sufficient. A 12-week program for men who have used violence is not sufficient because we continue to see the escalation of femicides and the increase in these numbers. We need to look for better intervention and better approaches.

• (1205)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: I agree.

When you were talking about online radicalization, my brain immediately went to Alek Minassian. I don't know if you know who that is, but I covered the Toronto van attack. This is a young man who was radicalized online. He told police at the beginning that it was because he was an incel, but through the course of that trial, we heard that really he was just radicalized online and he wanted to be part of the online group of mass murderers.

I also thought about the hashtag “men going their own way”.

What does that mean to you?

Mr. Humberto Carolo: Alek Minassian, along with so many young men who've been recruited into these hateful ideological communities, are looking for community. They're looking for belonging and for support, but they're finding it in all the wrong ways.

If we look at the social histories of Alek, of many young men like him and of many adult men, they indicate a significant lack of support and of early intervention. These are young men who are looking for belonging and for community—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Just to narrow that down, when you see #mgtow, is that part of the problem?

Mr. Humberto Carolo: It is part of the problem and we need to address that. We need to create online spaces and better programs to help young men address their own needs and social needs, so that they're not resorting to hateful ideologies and violence to address their own anger, their own exclusion and their own sense of not belonging anywhere.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: It's particularly concerning that the Leader of the Opposition is using a hashtag like this, but I'm going to move on.

Alison Irons, you gave such an impassioned opening statement both this time and last time, when you got cut off. Even before you got cut off, I started thinking of coercive control. I don't think you had gotten there yet in your speech, but that's immediately where I went. That's because in your daughter's case, even though there were no bruises, there were plenty of pieces of evidence to show that she could be in trouble.

We have coercive control implemented in other jurisdictions around the world. From your testimony today, I'm hearing it's not a magic bullet, so what do we need to do with this coercive control legislation?

Ms. Alison Irons: I'm speaking also as an ex-police officer.

I mentioned the education of the criminal justice system as being critical. I compared it to Keira's law because if you have a judiciary, a Crown and police who don't understand that a woman has to be hit before they can do anything, that's going to be seriously problematic. I do recall, having been a police officer, the number of times that women would be told, “I'm sorry, but he hasn't hit you yet, so there's nothing we can do, frankly.”

Another thing that deeply worries me is that this is going to be a dual procedure offence. One thing that galls me to no end about femicide right now is that, by and large, the Crown charges second-degree murder instead of first-degree murder.

My own bias is that, invariably, that's because the guy said that she made him do it, that he lost his temper or that he lost control when in fact, as in my daughter's case, the Crown told me that had he lived—because it was a murder-suicide—it would have been first-degree murder according to the plan they discovered he had.

I think there is a risk that if the Crown and criminal justice system aren't well educated, we'll see these all be summary convictions, which carry a maximum of six months of jail time.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: That's an excellent point, and I've covered many court cases with the exact same thing.

We have three recommendations from the National Police Federation. First, provinces and territories should commit more resources to the collection and sharing of data. Second, we recommend creating community bail enforcement monitoring, which means that if somebody doesn't act within their bail conditions, we know about it right away and police can act on it right away. Third, we recommend that a justice of the peace actually have legal experience and the expertise to oversee these bail hearings, which we know they do.

Ms. Alison Irons: I'm already concerned when you mention data because, as you know, we have implemented Bill C-71, which required adult lifetime background checks for gun licensing. I was in a meeting earlier in June with the RCMP and the national firearms program. I have made the point repeatedly that if in fact the police are now conducting those adult lifetime background checks and denying or revoking licences, their data should show an increase in the number of licence refusals and revocations. They can't even tell us that, three years after Bill C-71 was implemented.

As you know, the collection of the data is a serious problem. Police and media are still not reporting on when a legal gun is used in a femicide or a homicide, so data is a key concern of mine, for sure.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, I would like to welcome Andréanne Larouche.

You have the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

It is incomprehensible that, in 2024, there could be one more.

Ms. Tremblay, we've met before at this committee. You talked about the electronic bracelet issue, if I remember correctly. You said how much it could have prevented certain cases of violence. You really believed in it.

We are looking for concrete solutions to literally save women's lives. We will soon be studying a bill at the federal level. Quebec already has electronic bracelets, even though the most serious crimes are committed at the federal level. It would have been ridiculous if the federal government had not followed the provincial lead. Now there is an opening.

Can you go back to the importance of these kinds of measures for monitoring?

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Yes, when I appeared before this committee last November, we were talking about Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu's Bill S-205.

I think it is essential—and I will not back down from this, as it's important—that an electronic bracelet be required to be worn in all Canadian provinces. This measure must also be accessible to indigenous peoples in remote regions.

In my case, if my abuser had worn the electronic bracelet, that would have saved my life, so to speak. The second time he tried to kill me, he broke down my door and I was not able to escape as I would have liked. It was my neighbours who saved my life. When I walked outside, I was always looking around. I had taken self-defence courses. However, when you're dealing with a violent man, no matter how much you try to defend yourself, it's not always possible. I had a knife to my throat. I tried to defend myself at one point. I kicked him and jumped over the guardrail downstairs. Had my abuser worn the electronic bracelet, I would have been warned even before he broke down my door. Do you understand? I was lucky enough to survive thanks to my neighbours.

However, without the electronic bracelet, many women will die. It really has to be understood and the bracelet has to be imposed.

I also wanted to tell you quickly that I went to court to watch judges. They often use the first offence argument. In my opinion, a man being a first-time offender doesn't mean that he shouldn't be required to wear an electronic bracelet. Women don't get a first chance when domestic violence occurs. They have been beaten and threatened. It all starts with how a man takes action. As Ms. Irons described and as happened in my case, the man went for it. Some men go for it in the first offence.

I really want to emphasize that the wearing of an electronic bracelet must be mandatory. Judges should understand that. Could we, the women, meet with the judges? Could we have a chance to talk to them before they render their judgment? Could women be given a little chance? Do women get chances? No, they don't. If someone commits a violent act or makes threats of murder or anything else, that should be enough to require them to wear a bracelet. It would make violent men think even more. Do you think they'll like it? Of course not.

We don't like it either. We are in a prison and we want to get out.

• (1215)

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Ms. Tremblay.

In any case, we'll have to follow up on the wearing of the electronic bracelet and see how the measure is deployed in the field, given the connection problems that exist in some regions.

Ms. Riendeau, this isn't your first appearance before this committee either. You've already spoken about the criminalization of coercive control and Bill C-332. Have you had a chance to study it? I think the answer is yes, of course.

What's next? I don't think this bill is going to solve everything, so what would your recommendations be to complement it?

Ms. Louise Riendeau: For Bill C-332 to be applied optimally, it is absolutely necessary to train all the stakeholders who will have to apply it—police officers and prosecutors, among others—before it comes into force, so that they fully understand what it's all about and can assess situations very well.

These are the lessons we learned on a recent mission to Great Britain. Upstream training really is the secret.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Leah, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

I want to start out by thanking all the witnesses today. Your testimony is so critical, but I also know for many in the room, it's also very painful, and I want to acknowledge that. I hope I honour what you've gifted us with today with my questions.

I wanted to start out with Madam Anderson-Pyrz.

You spoke about how this needs to be a non-partisan issue. I agree with you. I think all levels of government—municipal, provincial, federal—have all failed since time immemorial to deal with gender-based violence. This is non-partisan, and every single political party is at fault for turning a blind eye to this violence, which is why this committee is so critical—women sitting together, and Marc, to address this ongoing issue.

You spoke about accountability, and I want to speak to that. Call for justice 1.7 says:

We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, to establish a National Indigenous and Human Rights Ombudsperson, with authority in all jurisdictions, and to establish a National Indigenous and Human Rights Tribunal.

Then it goes on to talk about what the responsibility would be.

The federal government issued a report, I think it was last year, on how to put in place an ombudsperson position—call for justice 1.7. It's now November. We have another report—no action.

How critical is it to get in place that ombudsperson's office right now? I'd say it's right now. I'm saying it's that urgent, but I want to hear what you would say.

Ms. Hilda Anderson-Pyrz: I think it's very critical to have an accountability mechanism in place, because without that mechanism, indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people are going to continue to die at alarming rates, and go missing and experience violence at alarming rates.

When we look at accountability mechanisms, I feel, regardless of what government is in power, as indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people, we've been experiencing violence for decades—including my grandmother, my great-grandmother, my mother, and me as well.

I think, collectively, each and every one of you and all levels of government have to focus on establishing an accountability mechanism where we're going to see change in this country; where we're going to feel safe as indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people; where we're not constantly looking over our shoulder, wondering if we're going to be next, if we're going to go missing, if we're going to be murdered, if we're going to experience violence; and to really focus on addressing the systemic and structural racism that's deeply embedded in state policies and state practices as well.

It's urgently needed.

• (1220)

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would also include in policing as well.

Ms. Hilda Anderson-Pyrz: Absolutely.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, absolutely. I have universal agreement in the room around policing.

We often talk about the end of the game. I've heard a lot of stuff about tough on crime and bail reform, and that's a critical piece to make sure.

However, Madame Tremblay, Mr. Broadfoot and Mr. Carolo, you spoke about the importance of education and resocializing men into pro-social, anti-violent behaviour, because by the time the police get involved, it's often too late.

You spoke of your daughter, Ms. Irons. By the time the police got involved, it was too late. And I have a question for you after.

From the three of you—and I have very limited time—why is education so important? It seems silly, but why is it critical to end gender-based violence? They say, “Oh, it's education. We need to get tough.” However, why is the education piece so critical?

I'll start with you, Madame Tremblay, then I'll move to Mr. Broadfoot and then to Mr. Carolo.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Education is the foundation, in my opinion. Everything happens when you're young. In many cases, children who have witnessed violence will repeat it. If we don't put pre-

ventive measures in place, the violence will repeat itself. Unfortunately, we live in an extremely violent world at the moment. There's a lot of violence in schools. Women have to defend themselves in schools.

I think we need to set up an information and communication system. As I explained earlier, we also need to set up resources so that people can intervene, go and educate our children and instill respect for women in them, respect for their mothers, their grandmothers—

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm so sorry. I'm out of time. Maybe in the next round the other two can answer.

Then I have a question for you around gun control.

The Chair: Thank you.

The five- and six-minute rounds go very quickly.

I'd like to welcome Anna.

You have the floor for five minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here.

I was at an event yesterday with Yellow Brick House, which organized a walk for survivors of violence against women and children. One of the things that was continually spoken about was a brave young lady who shared her story with us. I will keep her anonymous, because that's what she wanted us to do. Her story was one of abuse by a repeat abuser who continually abused her. Eight weeks before she was scheduled to be married, she decided that she could no longer stay in this relationship. Thank God for her strength. However, the abuser is still out there after being reported and arrested. She is running scared. She's fearing for her life.

I'm going to start with Lucas.

Lucas, do you think that if we are going to protect women like your sister, we need to ensure that the laws are strengthened so that criminals can be kept behind bars and women can feel free to walk the streets?

• (1225)

The Chair: Unfortunately, it appears as though we have lost Lucas online.

Anna, perhaps you could go on to another question.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you. I'll go to Madame Tremblay.

Do you agree that we need to strengthen the laws so that women aren't fearing for their lives?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Sincerely, yes. As I was saying earlier, women are the ones who are imprisoned right now. I'm not denigrating shelters. I've been there several times, including for a three-month period, and it's a good thing they exist. What I'm saying is that, even when we go to a shelter, our abuser stalks us. My abuser knew which shelter I was in. He even brought in a woman, who had claimed to have suffered domestic violence, to come and threaten me.

In short, it's important that these men stay behind bars and start therapy as soon as they arrive to become aware of their actions, even if some don't have a conscience and never will. If they're released, they'll do it again. You saw what happened in my case. Once my attacker had finished with me, he went after another woman, then another. There were three of us. If he'd stayed in prison, though, none of this would have happened.

[*English*]

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I have limited time and I want to ask you one more question.

You spoke about this earlier; we spoke about e-bracelets. I want to talk about a situation that has occurred in my riding.

A retired firefighter was shot by someone from MS-13 who crossed the border illegally. He was arrested and a bracelet was put on him. We just found out this weekend that the bracelet has been removed. Now, the individual—who, God pray for him every day, has survived after being shot seven times—is fearing for his life because he was able to identify the person.

I know the bracelet is a mechanism to ensure that they have control of where this individual is placed, but I don't think it's the only mechanism. I think we do need to keep them in jail until we can prove that they're not a risk to anyone else.

Madam Tremblay, do you agree with that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Tremblay: I completely agree with that. There's no other way than electronic bracelets. If they can be removed, we have to ask those who produce them to correct the flaws. That said, we absolutely must keep these men behind bars. Otherwise, I don't see how women victims can be free. For the moment, there is no other protection. These men also need training. If there are any who still don't understand, I don't know what to tell you.

[*English*]

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I've only got 20 seconds left, so I want to quickly ask a question of any of the witnesses who can respond.

Why is it that we're always having to find shelters for women? Why is it that we can't incarcerate the criminals and leave the women and children in the homes they're accustomed to?

Thank you.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we don't have any time for a response, but perhaps you could find some room to respond after a different question.

Emmanuella, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

Several of you spoke about education being a key to finally putting an end to gender-based violence and femicides. Some mentioned campaigns. Others spoke about integrating it into our school programs and teaching kids at a young age what safe relationships are, how to treat each other and how to control their anger.

Education, as you know, falls under provincial jurisdiction, but there are several things that the federal government can do in order to help implement these kinds of programs, or at least to ensure that the supports are there.

I'm not allowed to give any recommendations for this report, so can you give us some recommendations as to how the federal government could support this initiative?

That's for everybody who spoke to education being a key here.

Mr. Humberto Carolo: I can offer a couple of comments on this, if I may.

At a national level, it's really important that we work together with organizations like the Canadian Teachers' Federation to better train, equip and support their members, educators across the country, to provide this type of foundational education, and to start early and educate early.

So much of this is fuelled by the kinds of norms and socialization we teach boys and young men from a very early age about always being in control, always fighting back, standing their ground and not accepting any emotions other than anger. Rather, they need to accept a full range of emotions, to seek help when needed rather than keeping it in and to ask for help.

Without those kinds of early skills, boys and young men end up growing up not knowing how to deal with their feelings of loss, rejection and anger, and they end up using violence instead.

● (1230)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Madam Trou, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mathilde Trou: Thank you.

In Quebec, for example, the assistance and shelter homes go into primary and secondary schools to offer workshops. I think that, in other provinces and territories, it would be possible to target the specialized resources that are already doing this and provide them with sufficient recurring funding. In Quebec, we're not succeeding in meeting the demand from schools. We know that teachers are already overloaded with many other things in their daily lives. So, I think bringing specialized resources into schools would be a way of offering workshops to young people as early as possible.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

Ms. Trou and Ms. Riendeau, you talked about shelters and mentioned that one of the problems was the fact that women can't find affordable housing once they get to the second stage shelters. The government does a lot to build buildings or help convert them. Often, when the government plays a role in this, it requires that about 30% of construction be dedicated to affordable housing.

Do you have any recommendations on, for example, dedicating a certain percentage to women who are victims or survivors of domestic violence?

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I think that, beyond setting aside spaces for women who are victims of domestic violence, we need to speed up the delivery of social housing. The problem is access to affordable, safe housing for women. I think that's an important element. Indeed, we can look at how to ensure that women have access to this housing. Already, if there was more of it, that would solve part of the problem, because the waiting lists are very long for access to social housing.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Right.

I see I have less than 20 seconds left. So I'll yield the rest of my time, and thank all the witnesses for their interventions.

[English]

It's very precious to have you [Technical Difficulty—Editor]. I know that it's traumatizing and retraumatizing for some, so we really appreciate you being here.

The Chair: Thank you, Emmanuella.

Next, Andréanne, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This testimony is interesting. I had some questions on another subject, but I'll ask them later. Instead, I'm going to continue on the question of housing.

When I visit shelters, it's not the first time I've been told that emergency spaces are unfortunately not being freed up. In fact, women can't get a place in a second stage shelter to be able to get out of the cycle of poverty, and they're afraid of ending up on the street.

Ms. Riendeau, during the pandemic, I had discussions with the Ministry of Public Security in Quebec City. Money had been promised for shelter spaces. Investments had been announced by the federal government for these emergency spaces, and these funds were to be channelled through the Quebec government. But it took

another six months to get these funds released. Would you like to say something about the fact that, in the midst of a pandemic, it took another six months for the federal government to release the money to the Quebec government, even though we were living in an emergency situation?

• (1235)

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I think we do need to act quickly in such situations. Unfortunately, we see that negotiations between the federal and provincial governments are often long and arduous before services reach the people for whom they are intended.

For my part, I appeal to all parties to really provide these services to women and children and make things easier for them. In situations where a person's safety is at risk, we must act with diligence.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Ms. Riendeau.

Ms. Cooper, you quickly concluded your opening remarks by saying that measures had to be put in place immediately. In less than 30 seconds, what are the most urgent measures that need to be put in place? Would you have one or two measures to recommend to us?

[English]

Ms. Rosemary Cooper: Implement the MMIWG recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Was Lucas able to rejoin?

The Chair: Unfortunately, at this point, he was not.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay.

Understanding that this is a very difficult topic, I wanted to ask you this, Madam Irons, because you shared what happened to your daughter.

The Canadian Women's Foundation stated that "the presence of firearms...is the single greatest risk factor for lethality of domestic violence."

They also noted:

Rural women are particularly vulnerable to homicide by firearms. Saskatchewan reported the highest rate of firearm-related homicides in 2016, and Alberta experienced the second highest rate. Shotguns and rifles commonly kept in rural homes have been [recorded] as "the weapons of choice" when it comes to domestic violence by the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs. In violent homes, [they] have been used to intimidate and control women...in rural areas.

We've had this ongoing debate in the House of Commons around gun control.

I'm just wondering what your thoughts are about that.

Ms. Alison Irons: I'm very grateful to the government for the two bills that it has passed, but the concern remains. Bill C-21 is still, of course, in implementation. At a meeting I attended with public safety, I saw that their emphasis right now with that bill is to try to work on all the pieces of the bill concurrently. My point to them was that we had a terrible killing in Sault Ste. Marie last October and that we just had one in Harrow that involved a legal shotgun again. I asked them at that meeting whether, of all the priorities they're working on simultaneously, they could make a greater priority out of the safety of women and children.

I personally am perceiving right now an increase in the number of children whose lives are also being taken with their mother's lives. I'm very concerned about it. It's a myth that legal gun owners don't kill. For example, in terms of femicide, Lépine, of course, at École Polytechnique is the most famous one of all, but there are also Jones, Desmond, Finn, Pearson, Walsh, Soederhuysen and Quesnel. Legal gun owners who committed other crimes include Bissonnette, Lapa, Mercier, Brittain, Schmegelsky and McLeod, Raymond, Fabrikant, Gill, Bourque, and I could go on.

Those bills are very necessary because it's not only criminals who kill. However, in speaking with the RCMP and the national firearms centre, I'm not confident that those bills have been well implemented or that we have any data to show that they have. I don't have a lot of confidence yet that they're actually applying the law as it relates to Bill C-71 for sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Dancho has the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses for being here today.

It was challenging testimony to hear. I know that this committee hears a lot of very difficult topics, heartfelt stories and real traumas. I just would like to thank you for your courage in being here in the first place and in sharing your stories. I think it will have a very lasting impact on members of this committee—certainly speaking for myself.

Thank you very much for your raw testimony. It's deeply helpful to us, as policy-makers, to hear what you've experienced and how you feel that laws should be changed and that funding should be moulded in a way that may prevent deaths of loved ones, such as those in the stories you have shared today.

Ms. Irons, I'm deeply sorry about the loss of your daughter. Thank you for sharing her story. In your opening comments, you mentioned that her killer had not been physically violent but had been otherwise violent: verbally, using coercive control. Is that correct? Where were the shortcomings in legislation that could have provided some sort of roadblock? From what I understand about the way that a lot of intimate partner violence laws are written, someone has to be physically violent to get an electronic monitoring bracelet, for example. Are there other shortcomings? Also, with your knowledge of the laws and as an RCMP officer, can you speak to where those holes are and how the law could have better supported the protection of your daughter from this man?

• (1240)

Ms. Alison Irons: Well, one change has taken place, although it's not yet implemented. For example, I mentioned my fear, coming out of my policing career, of getting a restraining order in the case of my daughter. Under Bill C-21, there is a new provision in the law that says if an abuser or harasser of a woman—or it could be of a male in some cases—gets a restraining order, the chief firearms officer will be compelled by the court to do a search to see if that person has a licence or any guns, and the guns will be immediately forfeited or turned in. The problem is, as I said, that public safety is still working on all these concurrent priorities. Women may think that this piece has been implemented when, in fact, it's not yet in place.

The red flag laws under Bill C-21 are for a very limited time. They're only for 30 days. They're emergency risk orders, so they're very short. With a restraining order now, once it's implemented, that means that the gun licence suspension and the revocation of the guns will be for the duration of the restraining order, which could be as long as two years.

As I mentioned, my daughter was very reluctant to disclose the suicide threats. She finally did confide in me about one. To my dying day, I will regret that I didn't overrule my daughter, but I told her that we had to either call his parents or call the OPP. At that point, I'd just had it. My daughter was terrified because she said that he'd then get his guns seized—which would have happened—but that he could apply to get them back. He could appeal to get them back after 30 days. Furthermore, he could get an illegal gun anywhere else.

However, as I said before at the public safety committee, in the case of his legal guns that he owned, the law didn't have to make it easy for him to get those.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much, Ms. Irons.

Ms. Damoff and I worked on Bill C-21, and there was a lot of good discussion around those red and yellow flag laws. I appreciate your feedback on them.

I supported Bill S-205 that recently passed in the House of Commons with quite a bit of support, but one issue of that bill that I found concerning was this. It was a good effort there, but that bill was supposed to provide options to get electronic monitoring bracelets for all the sort of precursors to domestic violence that include, in addition to the physical violence, things like intimidation, break and enters, and things that judges don't necessarily think of as being precursors to domestic violence. Unfortunately, that was gutted from the bill at this committee, so it weakened the stretch of that bill.

Do you feel that those precursors—intimidation, break and enters—should be considered precursors to domestic violence in the eyes of a judge? Also, do you feel that electronic monitoring bracelets should perhaps be put on when something like intimidation is found to be the offence?

Perhaps I'll go to Ms. Tremblay and then briefly to Ms. Irons.

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Absolutely. I regret that this provision was removed from the bill. You know, when we come here to make recommendations, I understand that you discuss them among yourselves afterwards, but you should remember all the research and effort that went into making those recommendations. When we make a recommendation, it's because we're certain we need it.

So, yes, the electronic bracelet should be imposed as soon as there are violent words or gestures, or threats. That way, as soon as someone approaches someone's home to break down their front door, as happened to me, the police can arrive right away.

Earlier, I wanted to tell you that there's also a way for a woman to keep going. That would be to wear a medallion with a panic button that she can press as soon as something happens. That way, the police can intervene immediately. I've worn such a medallion.

So, if you have these two means, the electronic bracelet and the panic button, you have a good chance of getting out of the situation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Damoff, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Tremblay: Excuse me. I would like to add something very quickly: The panic button could be offered free of charge to women. When they go to court, they should be entitled to the panic button immediately. I think that would be a good thing. Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Chair, I assume you're restarting my time. Thank you.

I'm really sorry that we lost Lucas. If you're watching or if you watch this later, Lucas, I just want you to know that your sister continues to be the biggest and most colourful flower because of your advocacy. I understand that her heart continues to beat because your family made the choice to donate her organs.

To all of you who have come here to share your stories, I think that you are so brave. I have heard Lindsay's story many times, and she should be here with us right now, as should your sister, Lucas.

I don't know if you know that Keira's law also included a provision for judges to order electronic monitoring of people accused of intimate partner violence. That didn't get as much attention as the judicial education piece. One of the challenges with Keira's law is that it educates federal judges, and we're seeing provincially appointed justices of the peace who don't have legal training, particularly in Ontario.

Maybe I will start with you, Diane and Alison. How important is that education provincially to make sure that police services and provincially appointed judges have education around intimate partner violence and coercive control?

Ms. Alison Irons: May I?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes.

Ms. Alison Irons: We've recently learned, in the last couple of weeks, that despite over 100 municipalities in Ontario having declared intimate partner violence an emergency, the province chose to withdraw the bill that the NDP had put forward. I feel that in Ontario right now there is a bias in terms of appointments of judges and so forth who are going to be supportive of this kind of legislation. I always worry that our judges are still largely—to the extent that I'm aware of—male in this country. We don't know how many of them are actually abusers.

I think the education is essential. There is really no way to police judges. They police themselves. I think that we have to at least make those strides to attempt it, but I'm not highly confident.

● (1250)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have really limited time, Alison. I just quickly wanted to ask you this, because I know that you have tracked femicides as much as you can—and we don't do it or police services don't do it—to see how many are legal firearms owners. I'm just wondering. You went through some names, but how many...? I know you track that yourself, God bless you. Can you maybe share with us what you've found?

Ms. Alison Irons: I'm thinking of the list I have. Again, it's often in the rural homes.

As you say, my daughter's ex was from a rural area and she was deemed a rural victim because she was living in Bracebridge at the time, but in many of these cases.... For example, in the case of Jones, in Burk's Falls, Ontario, who killed a woman, her elderly mother and her adult son, Ulla Theoret had gone to the police because she alleged that her neighbour, Jones, had committed a sexual assault against her. I don't know what became of that, but in fact, because she rejected his advances, he went to her home and murdered her, her elderly mother and her adult son before shooting himself.

Another area that we've been working on extensively is how police use what we call the FIP hit codes or the codes that police can use. Earlier, somebody mentioned other types of coercive control. When they attend an occurrence, whether it's a break and enter or some kind of assault or harassment, there are actually over 400 codes that police can use to code an occurrence report that will trigger a firearms review.

Again, the problem, as I was told by a confidential source of mine—an ex-police officer—is that a lot of police officers and police forces either don't use them or don't know how to use them, so once again we're missing opportunities to code and capture these offences and perhaps prevent a tragedy.

I'm not sure if that answers your question.

Ms. Pam Damoff: This is just a really quick question for you, Alison: Should Bill C-71 and Bill C-21 be repealed?

Ms. Alison Irons: Absolutely not. We worked very hard. In fact, my issue with Bill C-71 and what I advocated so hard for was the background checks.

In my daughter's case, it turned out, through my own investigation after her murder, that in his past some many years before he met her, he had been convicted of forcible confinement and assault related to a drug trafficking transaction with another male. His parents had money for lawyers, so he was able to plea bargain his offences down. He got two years' probation. As soon as he got off probation, he applied for and got a gun licence, which is just ludicrous.

That's why Bill C-71 changed the five-year requirement for a firearm review of any criminal history to an adult lifetime history, but again, I'm not sure that they're actually doing anything with that yet.

The Chair: Thank you.

That concludes our panel for today. On behalf of the committee, I would like to provide a heartfelt thank you to all of the witnesses, both here in the room and online, for being with us and sharing your stories and your recommendations.

I would encourage any witnesses, if you did not get an opportunity to answer a question that was posed to you or would like to submit a question and provide an answer, please feel free to send it to the committee.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting for today?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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