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# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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**NUMBER 133**

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Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman





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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** I'd like to call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 133 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. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Please raise your hand if you wish to speak. I will track the time accordingly and will provide a signal when there is one minute left, and again when there are 30 seconds left. Thank you all for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 25, 2024, the committee is continuing 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 a trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence and femicides. This may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If at any point any participants feel distressed or need help, please contact our clerk. For all witnesses and members of Parliament, it is extremely important to recognize that these are very difficult discussions. Let's try to be as compassionate as we can in all of our conversations today.

For the first panel, from the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, we have Professor Myrna Dawson, director; from the National Association of Women and the Law, Suzanne Zaccour, director of legal affairs; from PolySeSouvient, Heidi Rathjen, coordinator; from Rebâtir, Marie-Claude Richer, director, and Élise Joyal-Pilon, lawyer and director.

At this point, we will now begin with our opening statements.

Professor Dawson, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Professor Myrna Dawson (Director, Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability):** Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to join you today.

In 2018, the United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women visited Canada. In her report on Canada that was presented to the United Nations General Assembly, she described Canada's response to violence against women and girls and gender-based violence as mainly policy and "project oriented, focusing on specific areas and lacking a...holistic legal framework" and connection with specific human rights. She went on to say that it also lacks

the coordination of prevention measures and "comparable data collection for all forms of gender-based violence against women".

While her description is frequently argued to be the fault of our current government, I have been active in this field for three decades and am familiar with Canada's previous strategies. I and many others know that this lack of a comprehensive, cohesive response has been an ongoing issue for decades across successive leaders and governments, and across all parties.

For just one example, in 1994, the Organization of American States introduced the Belém do Pará Convention on Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women. Thirty years later, Canada remains one of only two countries that have not yet signed and ratified this convention. The situation is more dire today, given that the special rapporteur's visit was before COVID-19.

The impact of the pandemic on women and children experiencing male violence has been well documented. Progress is fragmented in its responses to the impacts across the country. The lack of a comprehensive, cohesive response exacerbates male violence against women, including femicide, which represents only a hint of the reality of this violence. However, femicide remains one of our best social barometers. It's indicative of all levels of all violence experienced by women and girls, regardless of whether it ends in death.

The Canadian Femicide Observatory has documented that every year since 2019 we have witnessed an increase in the number of women and girls murdered, primarily by men, with a total increase of 20% up to 2023. The numbers for 2024 are not looking better, with the current figure exceeding 2023 with one key difference: In 2023, 89% of the killings involved male accused; in 2024, this number has risen to 94%. The number of women and girls killed has not declined and it also looks like the proportion of males accused in their killings has increased.

What is also demonstrated is that some groups of women and girls in particular are at disproportionate risk. These are indigenous, Black and other racialized women; women and girls living in rural, northern and remote regions of our country; and women and girls in the territories and the prairie provinces.

There are other groups made vulnerable to femicide by the lack of a comprehensive response. However, without good data, it is difficult to document the situation of, for example, women and girls living with disabilities; newcomer, migrant and refugee populations; LGBTQ+ communities; and our older women. This is why we need a national data collection system whose primary goal is prevention rather than merely the administrative needs of the government. Data gaps are putting the lives of women and girls at risk.

Change has occurred on paper with little corresponding change for those groups at greatest risk. This means that changes on paper have not translated to changes in practice.

Briefly, there are five reasons why I think progress has been minimal.

First, we still have significant regional variation in what's available across the country. Federalism should not be a barrier to equitable human rights for women and girls, but it can be and has been used as an excuse.

Second, the primary focus has been on criminal justice, ignoring the role played by other vital sectors, especially in terms of funding services that are more focused on prevention or could play a more active role in intervention.

Third, despite repeated references to ongoing training, especially in the field of criminal justice, it is not clear what the quality of that training is, who is providing it, how often...and its impacts, if any.

Fourth, there have been few, if any, meaningful efforts at assessing implementation processes and outcomes. Thus, there is little knowledge about the efficacy of the any initiatives.

Finally, it is recognized that attitudinal change is one key requirement for moving forward. Our leaders, professionals and the general public continue to hold outdated and harmful stereotypes about why this violence occurs and who its primary victims are. Therefore, primary prevention initiatives are a priority.

Today, we launched a "remember me" campaign, which individually highlights each of the more than 160 women and girls murdered so far in 2024. One woman or girl is murdered every other day in this country.

There are some simple first steps. Call it femicide. Recognize and make the governments and leaders accountable to responding to femicide. Establish special regional femicide forums to recognize the regional diversities of femicide across the country. Increase awareness and education through primary prevention initiatives to address negative attitudes. Finally, enhance data collection, so we can actually understand the real trends and patterns in killings of women and girls.

Thank you.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next, I would like to welcome Ms. Zaccour.

You have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Suzanne Zaccour (Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the members of the committee for inviting me to speak today.

I'm here on behalf of the National Association of Women and the Law, or NAWL, a feminist organization committed to using the law as a tool to advance gender equality in Canada. In 2024, we celebrate 50 years of legal leadership as we continue to advocate for legal reform to end violence against women, defend reproductive justice, ensure that climate legislation is gender-inclusive and advance women's economic security and empowerment.

In choosing to study femicide, this committee is bringing its attention to the ultimate and irreversible manifestation of violence against women. Femicide cannot be undone or repaired, so prevention really has to be the key.

Prevention has many dimensions. It includes ensuring that women can leave violent relationships, which touches on critical issues like economic security, housing and family law reform. Prevention also means physical protection for women, including removing weapons from abusive homes, issuing protection orders and improving police interventions. On that front, I would like to draw the attention of this committee to one particular legislative intervention that is already in place but not yet in force. I'm referring to the domestic violence provisions in Bill C-21 that amended the Firearms Act.

Bill C-21 was adopted in December 2023, a year and a half after it was first introduced. It included a requirement for chief firearms officers to revoke an individual's firearms licence within 24 hours if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that they may have engaged in domestic violence or stalking. The bill also included the automatic revocation of a person's firearms licence if they become subject to a protection order such as an order by the court not to be within a certain distance of the person's ex-partner.

The National Association of Women and the Law played a critical role in the development of these provisions, not only advocating for them but also proposing concrete language to amend the bill at committee. Clearer language, strict timelines and a lower threshold to err on the side of caution were adopted as a result of NAWL's advocacy. The bill was then voted by both Houses, and most of the bill came into force last December.

Here's the problem. The domestic violence provisions are not in force, and it's been close to a year since their adoption. The measures have been described as life-changing and important to protect women and children. They were closely studied by the two committees, and they have a lengthy legislative history, so why is there so much delay with measures that could save lives?

NAWL and PolySeSouvient have developed a detailed brief outlining what is needed to bring into force and operationalize the domestic violence provisions of Bill C-21. Our recommendations are listed in our brief to this committee. We ask that the committee echo these recommendations with a sense of urgency, given the importance of protecting women from domestic violence inflicted through firearms.

As a final point, I want to emphasize how much family law also contributes to women's entrapment in violent relationships, leading to continued and increased domestic violence and risk of femicide. We live at a time when victims say things like "If I had known what was going to happen with family court, I would have never left", or "I never would have reported". It's also a time when lawyers tell women not to disclose domestic violence because they will lose their kids. This is, I think, simply unacceptable.

Instead of preventing gender-based violence, the law is actively promoting a culture of silence, abuse and impunity. This is why the UN, 250 women and feminist organizations across the country, countless survivors and many experts and academics are calling on Canada to legislate to stop courts from using sexist reasoning and pseudo-concepts such as parental alienation when deciding children's fate.

The law must stop being complicit in keeping women entrapped in relationships where their lives are at risk.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent issues.

I welcome your questions.

• (1110)

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

Next I would like to welcome Ms. Rathjen.

You have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen (Coordinator, PolySeSouvient):** Thank you.

I want to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak today as part of its study.

My name is Heidi Rathjen. I was a student at the École Polytechnique in 1989 when 14 young women were shot and killed because they were women. Gun control is a public safety issue, but it's also a women's issue. PolySeSouvient consists of students and graduates of the École Polytechnique as well as families of the victims who support stricter gun control. Our focus is two-fold. We want to prevent mass shootings and prevent femicides, as these both apply to the tragedy that unfolded at our school. In fact, they're often intertwined.

In 68% of cases of mass shootings in the United States over a five-year period, the perpetrator killed at least one partner or family member or had a history of domestic violence. In Canada, many mass shootings are committed by domestic abusers. We have only to think of the 2020 Nova Scotia mass shooting.

[*English*]

While guns on their own don't kill, they make killing easier. Guns don't kill people. People with guns kill people. This is especially true in the context of domestic violence.

Intimate partner violence that involves a firearm is 12 times more likely to result in death than similar incidents that do not involve a firearm. Familicide in Canada consists of "a gendered crime involving primarily male accused who often target female victims, have a history of domestic violence, and commit the killings using firearms".

From 2010 to 2018, 36% of domestic homicides where the weapon was identified involved firearms. A study in rural New Brunswick and P.E.I. found that two-thirds of the women whose homes had firearms said that knowing firearms were present made them more fearful for their safety.

At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to debunk a disingenuous talking point that is continuously used to oppose controls on legal gun ownership, including Bill C-21. The gun lobby constantly tries to minimize the involvement of firearms in domestic violence, because it contradicts their principal narrative, which is that the only problem is illegal guns in the hands of gangs or criminals. They often claim or use the slogan that "less than 1% of ALL domestic violence calls even have a firearm present at the address, let alone used or threatened".

First, what they are doing is conflating gun-owning households with what police consider to be the "most serious weapon present" relevant to the incident. If one took the same logic and applied it to knives, then only 3% of households would have knives.

Secondly, it is completely normal to find that a small percentage of domestic violence calls involve a firearm. The threat or use of a firearm is arguably the most lethal or potentially lethal form of violence, and understandably represents a small fraction of all domestic incidents, including threats, mild physical force, physical injury, sexual assault, confinement and so on.

The gun lobby is essentially telling legislators and the public, including two people who are sitting right behind me—Tara Graham, daughter of recent femicide victim Brenda Tatlock-Burke, and Brian Sweeney, father of Angie Sweeney, who was killed a year ago in a familicide that also ended the life of three small children—that it's not necessary to systematically remove guns from domestic abusers like the perpetrators who killed their loved ones, because their murders fall within only a small percentage of all domestic violence calls to police.

In conclusion, I'd like to quote Tara, who in her brief to this committee writes that the tragic murder of her mother "highlights the urgent need to enact key new measures included in Bill C-21 aimed at protecting victims of domestic abuse....It is very disconcerting that these measures have not yet been enacted. Despite being engaged in years of abuse against my mother, Mike Burk[e] legally owned six or seven guns. If the police had been aware of the abuse, his firearms could have been removed."

I hope this committee will heed her words and urge the government to immediately enact the relevant provisions in Bill C-21 and to direct provincial chief firearms officers to ensure their effective implementation.

• (1115)

Thank you.

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

Finally, I would like to welcome Madame Richer and Madame Joyal-Pilon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Richer and Ms. Joyal-Pilon, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer (Director, Rebâtir):** Thank you for inviting us to speak to you.

I'm joined today by Élyse Joyal-Pilon, a lawyer at Rebâtir. She works in management and serves as a resource person in matters of safety for victims.

My name is Marie-Claude Richer. I'm a lawyer and director of Rebâtir, which was established on September 21, 2021. Rebâtir's mandate is to provide four hours of free legal consultation to any victim of domestic and sexual violence, anywhere in Quebec, in any field of law. In three years, we've provided over 67,000 legal consultations to more than 16,000 victims.

For 47 years, I was a friend of Lisette Corbeil, the victim of a femicide in 2021. This fatal act was the first act of physical violence committed against her. However, she had been a victim of coercive control for a number of years.

Today, we want to emphasize the urgent need for Canada to recognize coercive control as a criminal act. In addition to acting as a deterrent, this recognition would enable police officers and prosecutors to show evidence in court of ongoing deprivation of liberty. Judges would then have a more accurate view of the situation and would have the chance to make informed decisions. They currently can't do so, since they have only a snapshot of a film that has often been running for a long time.

The justice system currently lacks all the tools needed to protect victims and their children.

We urge the committee to recommend the following amendments to the Criminal Code.

First, we recommend that all murders of intimate partners, including femicides, be deemed first degree murder, along the same lines as the murders of police officers in the line of duty. This would remove the onus on the prosecutor to prove premeditation.

The minimum sentence for first degree murder is life imprisonment.

To better protect victims who have the courage to come forward, a paragraph should be added to section 495.1 of the Criminal Code, which covers the powers of police officers in the event of a breach of conditions. The addition would specify that, in cases of intimate partner violence, police officers would have the obligation—and not just the power—to proceed with the arrest of the accused without a warrant.

Section 515 of the Criminal Code should also be amended to require the court to give reasons for refusing to order the accused to wear an electronic monitoring device if the prosecutor makes the request.

Lastly, the prosecutor should be reminded of the need to request, at the release investigation stage, an assessment of the risk posed by the accused in cases involving homicidal risk factors such as strangulation, death threats, suicidal statements and non-compliance with both civil and criminal court orders.

• (1120)

**Ms. Élyse Joyal-Pilon (Lawyer & Director, Rebâtir):** In addition to these recommendations concerning the criminal justice system, we would like the committee to recommend the following measures.

We propose that professional associations and educational institutions that train workers liable to respond in domestic or sexual violence situations make basic or ongoing training in coercive control and homicide risk factors mandatory.

We also recommend that the judicial appointment process include a requirement to meet with candidates. The process should also include a requirement to take into account the candidates' level of legal knowledge and experience in the areas of law in which they would perform their duties. This would help emphasize the need for Quebec Superior Court judges in the family division to have the relevant experience in and knowledge of family law.

The concepts of coercive control and risk factors, along with knowledge of criminal law—including the interpretation of conditions of release—play a vital role in decisions that may affect the safety of victims and their children.

We also propose that all organizations that work with victims set up a specialized team to handle these cases and to support the organization's staff.

Lastly, we propose that government authorities launch a national awareness campaign on healthy relationships and coercive control, including in schools.

We maintain that, to work properly, a safety net must include multiple components. However, these components must be intertwined. For this to work, it's crucial to allocate the necessary human and financial resources, in particular qualified staff who have the time to manage these complex and often urgent cases.

Safety is also a collective responsibility. We all have a role to play. Coercive control must be recognized as a systemic issue in Canada.

The Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale puts it this way: "We must collectively live up to the courage of these women."

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

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

At this point, we will begin our first round of questioning.

Dominique, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for coming to speak to the committee. Today is an important day. It's the 25th International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Yesterday or this morning, the United Nations, or UN, released figures showing that 85,000 women and girls were intentionally killed in 2023. A woman is killed every 10 minutes on this planet. It's staggering.

This morning, on the radio and in multiple media outlets, a number of analysts and journalists weighed in on this issue. That's a good thing. For example, Louise Riendeau, from the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, basically said that women who lack housing have no way out. We can address this issue later.

Mr. Dagher, director of the City of Montreal's police department, was deeply moved this morning on the Radio-Canada radio. He implored women to turn to the police. Yet we know that the police can hinder reporting, because women don't necessarily trust the system, unfortunately. They worry that they won't be believed and that the process will take too long. Moreover, they feel that, in any case, no one understands domestic violence and all that it entails. Ms. Zaccour and I talked about this in connection with the parental alienation issue. In short, they fear the potential negative impact.

Ms. Richer, what are your thoughts on Mr. Dagher's comments this morning?

I'll then turn to Ms. Zaccour.

• (1125)

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer:** I would say that, yes, women are afraid.

Over the past three years, we've been lucky enough—or unlucky enough—to talk with 16,000 women in Quebec who are victims of domestic violence. Some women say that, had they known what would happen to them, they wouldn't have reported the violence.

Why not? Because they don't feel safe. Yet safety is the cornerstone of a victim's successful journey through the justice system. Above all, the victim needs to be safe.

At Rebâtir, we often meet with women before the reporting stage. This approach is unique in Quebec. We're the only law firm that meets with victims before they turn to the police. First, we meet with them to reassure them. We then explain how things will work in the justice system so that they know what to say and how to make a good statement. We know that this statement will be analyzed by the courts.

We meet with the women and make them feel safe. It's important to weave a safety net around them. That's why, when the women file a complaint in connection with a breach of conditions, the accused must be brought before the courts as quickly as possible.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** You're giving me some good food for thought.

Aren't we a bit lax in Canada these days? We no longer know what language or tone to use. People, mostly men, who should be in prison, aren't. Instead, they're at home after committing serious acts. Some probably deserved 10 years in prison, but they're serving their sentences at home. Others are released when they shouldn't be.

That's the current situation. This has been the information given to us so far in our study.

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer:** There are a number of areas to address.

The victim faces the greatest danger when the separation is announced and in the ensuing months. The perpetrator of the act of violence then loses control over the victim. That's when the victim needs protection. A safety net must be established as soon as the victim files a complaint.

In cases where the accused fails to comply with the conditions, we propose that they be brought before the court so that the court can consider, for example, the possibility of requiring them to wear an electronic monitoring bracelet.

Moreover, a judge can currently decide not to require them to wear an electronic monitoring bracelet without providing any justification. We ask that judges be required to provide reasons for not ordering a bracelet to be worn.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** There are so many things to say about this.

Two weeks ago, on major networks, and again recently on Radio-Canada and Télé-Québec, we heard some chilling toxic masculinity rhetoric.

In some countries, women's voices can no longer be heard in public spaces.

What are your thoughts on this, Ms. Zaccour? How will we overcome this and resolve the issue of violence against women once and for all?

We don't want to limit anyone's right to speak. However, some comments are currently scaring us.

• (1130)

**Ms. Suzanne Zaccour:** Thank you for the question.

I think that everyone agrees on the need to raise awareness and implement policies to prevent masculinism. Our way of identifying these issues also matters.

Since I'm speaking to people who hold legislative authority, let me say that we shouldn't assume that these masculinist attitudes are conveyed only by the people heard on the radio. They're all over our society, including in our courts and police forces.

As a result, it's necessary to listen to the demands of the women's rights movement, which identify the priority actions needed to protect us in this environment.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** In any case, I give radio interviews and I'm not shy about telling women to stay alert.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Vien.

[English]

Next I would like to welcome MP Hefpner.

You have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll turn to the lawyers representing Rebâtir.

In France, lawyers represent not only the Crown and the accused, but also the victim.

In my previous life, I was a journalist and I saw many criminal trials. I always felt that the victims had no voice. People were available to help them understand the process. However, they didn't have access to a person with the necessary skills to advocate on their behalf and convey what they needed to remain safe.

What do you think of this idea? How could a similar mechanism be implemented to enable victims to express their needs here in Canada?

**Ms. Élyse Joyal-Pilon:** One thing that we've learned since the founding of Rebâtir is that victims need a voice. We're part of that voice. Criminal law is one of the legal fields involving the most consultations. In Quebec, victims needed better guidance, support, advice and information. Specialized people are needed to help them. Our lawyers have been trained in this area.

As Ms. Richer said, our service is one of the first of its kind. Victims have access to an independent lawyer who focuses exclusively on advocating for their interests.

A lawyer represents the accused, while the prosecutor represents the Crown. However, when victims come to us, we counsel them directly. We explain the process and the steps involved to them. It

may seem trivial, but it isn't. As a result, at the next stage, the victim feels more confident. The victim will better understand what will happen and what the court or the players involved will decide and why.

Indeed, we're constantly talking with victims about safety. It's a key element in all our work. It's omnipresent. It's the first thing that comes to mind. Even before providing legal advice to a person, we look at their safety, because the legal process depends on safety. Superior and criminal courts alike should proceed according to the level of risk involved in each case.

When it comes to breaches of conditions, there aren't any minor cases. There's a culture of downplaying certain actions. We must all recognize that a breach of conditions constitutes a risk factor. That's how it should be viewed.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** I would also say that there aren't enough lawyers like you, who give a lot of advice to people who need it. Despite all that work, you don't have the standing needed to speak directly to judges. I imagine that judges wouldn't need as much training if there was a lawyer whose role was to plead on behalf of victims.

Do you agree with that?

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer:** Yes, we agree. That's why, in our recommendations, we ask that judges be better selected when they have to render judgments. I've been a lawyer for 35 years, but I practised family law for 32 years and, just three years ago, I didn't know what coercive control was. I don't mind saying so.

Unfortunately, not all judges currently sitting on the criminal division of the Superior Court and the Court of Quebec know what coercive control is. They need to be educated, and it is not enough to make training available to them. That training needs to be mandatory so that they can assess the risks to victims' safety. That's what's going to change things. Strangulation is one risk factor among others. A number of risk factors have been mentioned today.

Indeed, it would be a major step forward if victims could be represented by a lawyer in the criminal and penal division of the Court of Quebec or elsewhere in Canada. As you said, that lawyer could come and explain concepts that may be less well known.

Domestic violence is an extremely complex issue. There are a number of factors to consider, and each case is unique. If that could become a reality in Canada, it would be really beneficial.

• (1135)

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** Thank you.



I think that's very important.

[English]

I would like to turn now to Professor Dawson. I know a big part of your work is research. We're lacking a lot of data on gender-based violence in this country, I think in part because so few women come forward with complaints. Would you talk to us about your work collecting data, where the gaps are and how we can better support better disaggregated data collection in this country?

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** We talk about data as a defence against femicide and against gender-based violence. Just to give one example of how we have significant data gaps in Canada, recently the United Nations statistical framework came out with 10 variables that were indicative of femicide. The homicide survey in Canada—our official recognition of it—could gather information on only four of those 10 variables. If you consider Canada as a relatively good environment for data, that's a big issue. The variables don't capture the nuances surrounding what are prevention aspects of gender-based violence and violence against women, so for things like what direction or protection orders are in place, we don't know what direction, who was it who had the protection order; or for prior violence, we don't know who perpetrated the violence against who, but just that there was prior violence. These are the nuances that are required for prevention, and we don't have it at the very basic level.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Everyone who has spoken today has talked about November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In Quebec, we also mark this occasion with activities, which begin on that date and will culminate on December 6, when women were killed because they were women.

I'm wearing a white ribbon, handmade by members of the Association f eministe d' ducation et d'action sociale, which is in my riding. That association has also launched Op eration Tendre la main—a campaign to raise awareness.

I listened to all the witnesses' opening remarks, and I get the impression that awareness really needs to be raised.

Dominique and I heard the same interviews this morning. On Monday mornings, we leave our respective ridings to come to Ottawa, and we take the opportunity to catch up on the news. Today, there was obviously a lot of talk about this day with a number of stakeholders. There was also talk about housing. Toward the end of my commute, I listened to a webinar, which covered the issue of online violence. Finally, the situation of Afghan women and the issue of education were discussed.

The committee is obviously looking for solutions to this problem.

Ms. Rathjen, this is one of the first topics I spoke on after being elected in December 2019. I still remember that. When I was a

young woman in Quebec, I realized at that young age that my situation, as a woman, was threatened. I didn't understand it in elementary school, but in 2019, when I had to talk about the incident at  cole Polytechnique, I thought back to that moment in my life.

Gun control was discussed, and I also talked about it in 2019. Since then, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security has conducted studies on the subject. As you know, we are often in contact with Member of Parliament Kristina Michaud. In her remarks, Ms. Zaccour also talked about gun control.

It's 2024, but I get the impression that we're moving forward and moving backward on this issue.

Last week, during a debate in the House, the issue of firearms was discussed. Over a year and a half ago, one of the main recommendations in a report by the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security was to appoint a panel of independent experts with a mandate to advise the government. The goal was to avoid poor quality analyses concerning firearms, which would then force us to go backward. It is now November 2024, and that committee's recommendation has still not been implemented.

What are the main recommendations that our committee should retain and that should be implemented as quickly as possible with respect to gun control?

• (1140)

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** I admit that I have not done my homework and have not read the report. However, when it comes to domestic violence, the government has listened to victims' groups and women's groups. It has actually included measures in Bill C-21 that will make a difference. I'm thinking in particular of the measures concerning men's control over their victims, although that is only a small part of the problem.

So the government has done a very good job in this area. In committees, all the parties supported these provisions. That may be contradicted by the leaders of certain parties, but the work was done well in committees.

The problem is that these measures are not yet in effect a year later. As to why it takes so long, that would be a question for the government, not for us. However, the situation is urgent. Every week, another murder is committed with a firearm in a domestic violence context.

In the sequence of events leading to a death, the use of a firearm is actually the weakest link. That is where very concrete intervention—the seizure of a firearm—is possible. The situation immediately becomes less dangerous. There are certainly many things that need to be done, but a firearm can be seized quickly and simply. Unfortunately, that is not done, or it is done in ways that vary greatly across the country.

That said, the measures in the bill will make it mandatory, and non-discretionary, to intervene and seize firearms in such contexts.

Unfortunately, we are still waiting, and we are worried. We want these measures to be implemented before an election is held, and we don't know when it will be called.

So it's a race against the clock. These measures should be implemented quickly. I note that they were adopted by both houses, including the House of Commons, and parliamentarians were democratically elected.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** My time is up.

I hope to have the opportunity to come back to this, Ms. Richer and Ms. Joyal-Pilon.

[English]

**The Chair:** MP Gazan, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Unfortunately, we've had a stalemate in the House and nothing's going through right now, which is deeply concerning.

The other thing I find concerning—I'm just going to share this—is that I find a lot of the laws and positions are being based on ideology and not research and fact. I see that more and more, and I think, particularly when we're talking about gender-based violence and rehabilitation so that we can have safer communities, we are moving further away from that because of things like the gun lobby, as one example.

I want to ask a question of you, Madam Dawson. In some of your research, one of the statistics I found really troubling is that in 2020, women aged 54 to 64 comprised the largest portion of victims, followed closely by those aged 25 to 34 and then those aged 35 to 44.

I found that striking. Is the perpetrator an intimate partner in those cases or are they another family member?

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** I think you're asking about the older women. The older or senior women are an emerging group at risk. The 35-to-44 group is the highest risk group for a femicide, but 55-plus is emerging as one. Those are intimate partners. The second group that's quite disturbing is that it's a lot of sons killing their mothers. We have a high proportion of sons killing their mothers. First are intimate partners, and they are followed by sons.

• (1145)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I asked that question because we often talk about tough on crime approaches. We don't talk enough about things like prevention or rehabilitation.

Would you say the lack of rehabilitation and prevention is what's resulting in sons also becoming perpetrators of violence in the family?

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** I don't think we can be specific about whether that's targeted towards sons. We have a lack of prevention across the board in our responses, and we have a lack of evidence-based responses. We need a whole host of prevention strategies, including gun control, but also, if you think about taking a public

health approach to a public health crisis, we need to focus on the negative attitudes that are actually the driving force behind male violence against women and girls regardless of their relationship with the victim.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'm going to ask this question, and then I'll move on.

Do you feel that, if we're going to deal with gender-based violence, we need a public health approach, rather than a tough on crime approach?

I find in my community that we have more police than ever and the rates of violence have gone up. We've had a record amount of women being murdered in my community because we don't deal with public health; we're doing tough on crime.

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** I absolutely agree with the public health approach. If you look at our work, that's the approach that we actually take.

I will emphasize that a part of the public health approach is effective criminal justice responses, as well.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I have a couple of questions. I wish I had 40 minutes just for me.

Rural and northern areas are often neglected. We see high rates of violence, and no resources or shelters. You've researched that. What kinds of findings have you reached?

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** Femicide is disproportionately experienced in rural communities compared with the population size. About half of femicides occur in rural communities, whereas about 16% of the population of Canada is living in rural communities. Often this does involve guns and prior histories of violence, and often there are children and other family killed as a result.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I want to move over to you, Madam Rathjen. Is that okay?

You spoke about the gun lobby. I get a gazillion emails in my email box from the gun lobby. They're certainly good at writing emails. A lot of misinformation that I hear in the House of Commons from members of Parliament is regurgitated messaging from the gun lobby.

Do you feel that the politicization of gun control is indirectly related to increased femicides?

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Indirectly, yes, because the disinformation that's circulated by the gun lobby and, I have to say, by Conservative MPs and, in some cases, the NDP with respect to the assault weapons ban, was largely responsible for the failure to get an assault weapons ban.

I think the rhetoric of Pierre Poilievre—who is constantly going around now saying that we have to go after the criminals and the gangs, and leave legal gun owners alone—undermines everything that we're trying to say here. We're not against gun ownership. We're not against hunting and so on. We're not against first nations and their rights to hunt. These are weapons that, in the context of domestic violence, put women and children at risk and need to be addressed.

Unfortunately, the gun lobby tries to minimize firearms involved in domestic violence, and the leader of the Conservative Party never mentions domestic murders committed with guns, as far as I've heard.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

At this point, we'd like to have Michelle Ferreri.

You have the floor for five minutes.

• (1150)

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much to everyone here and to the victims' families. You have my deepest condolences.

We hear a lot about intimate partner violence and death. The data is shocking. There's a lot to unpack here from some really great witnesses.

One of the questions I did have is for Ms. Richer.

You do something that we think is wonderful, which is offering free services to victims, counselling to support victims of intimate partner or sexual violence. Do you have the data to see if the number of the people you're helping has increased?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer:** Our organization has been in existence for only three years. Our problem right now is that we have only 14 lawyers to serve all of Quebec.

We are unable to meet the demand and, as a result, it is difficult to know whether the data is increasing from year to year. I would say that it is, as our phone lines are getting busier. In other words, the demand is real.

That said, our organization is increasingly well known, as our services are recommended a lot by organizations such as the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale and the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes, as well as by police services. That's why we have a high number of requests.

So I would be inclined to tell you that there is an increase in demand, but, statistically, I couldn't be more precise. However, we have already provided 67,000 consultations in three years, which is huge. It's important to mention it, but we sometimes forget that coercive control is really an important piece of information. For most, if not all, of the victims we've met with, a form of coercive control was involved.

[*English*]

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you so much.

Ms. Rathjen, you pointed out the Conservatives, so as a Conservative I feel compelled to answer you. I want to say that we 100% want criminals not to have access to guns. Men who are killing women, who have a history of domestic violence, of coercive control, who have been convicted of these crimes are criminals. These are the people we don't want to have access to guns.

To your point, I know that Ms. Larouche asked you this question in French, and I'm going to ask it of you in English. You said in committee that individuals who are subject to a protection order or are convicted of domestic violence become ineligible for a firearms licence—automatic revocation of an individual's firearms licence—if they are subject to a protection order, and that an individual's firearms licence must be revoked if a CFO reasonably suspects him of domestic violence or stalking.

This is a Liberal bill that has been passed, and it has not been implemented. Why not? Have you been given any answers? We, as Conservatives, 1,000% support this, and I want you to know that.

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Thank you for the question.

I really appreciate what you said. Like I mentioned, these provisions, in committees.... I don't have a perfect memory, but my memory is that the Conservative members did support them. At the same time, Pierre Poilievre promised to repeal all gun control measures that affect legal gun owners, so licence revocation is a measure that affects legal gun owners—

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** However, if these are criminals, I think that's where we're.... I'm open to that discussion with you, but I just want to put on the record, criminals—and these are criminals we are talking about—should not have access to firearms, 100%. These judges, to your point, need better.... It is insane, and we've heard it, and we've seen it.

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Can I just specify that—

• (1155)

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Yes, for sure.

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** —in many cases, they're not convicted, so this is a preventative measure, because in Canada, there's no right to own guns, and if there's a risk, police have the ability to remove guns and revoke the licence before anybody is technically a criminal. It is like a protection order. The person hasn't been convicted yet, but the judge recognizes that there are enough risk factors to intervene and reduce the liberty of the individual.

To answer your question of why this has not been implemented yet, I tell you, I do not know. This is an internal thing. The machine probably needs to do some things, enact some regulations or some order in council, to make it enforceable, and that seems to be taking an extremely long time.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Michelle.

MP Sidhu, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

Madam Chair, I would like to acknowledge that today is International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

I also want to thank all of the witnesses for sharing their knowledge with us today.

I want to ask my first questions of Ms. Zaccour.

Ms. Zaccour, right now, the term “femicide” has many definitions across different jurisdictions. If Canada were to add the offence of femicide to the Criminal Code, which definition has proven to be the most promising? Could you talk about that?

**Ms. Suzanne Zaccour:** Thank you so much for the question.

To answer it, I think I'll go back to what I said during my remarks and say that femicide cannot be repaired, cannot be cancelled, cannot be addressed after the fact, so I really believe that the preventative measures are key.

Often, some of the men who kill their partner, kill themselves immediately afterwards, so we're not convinced, given that murder is already criminal, that it's going to make a significant difference if the Criminal Code defines “femicide”.

What we think is that women need to be safe to leave, because that's when they're being killed, when they try to leave, when they try to access the family courts. Their separation is when they're most at risk.

We were asking earlier why people always say to women that they should go to the police when it's actually not safe for them to do it. There are risks of losing their kids in family court. However, people also say that women should leave, and again they're not safe doing so, because that's when they're most likely to experience femicide. That's where the prevention needs to be essential, enabling women to be safe after these relationships, and not be entrapped in them.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you.

Professor Dawson, I know that my colleagues asked about the data you mentioned in your opening statement and in your answers, but I want to ask about data specifically for newcomers, women with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ2 community and the racialized women community. Could you talk about them? You said that the data is lacking. What reform do you want to make? What type of data needs to be collected? You are collecting data. Can you explain that particularly? I know that my colleagues asked, but I still need to ask about racialized and disabled women.

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** I didn't have much time to respond to that question, so I appreciate the follow-up. With respect to some of the groups that are made more vulnerable, we don't have that data covered by Statistics Canada. For example, if we look at the homicide survey, it collects only basic information. At the point of the investigation, the police fill out the report, and that's submitted to Statistics Canada. There is no follow-up with the data to add information that might have come out through the court process.

We do have domestic violence death review committees, which is one way to capture data, which has been an advance for us. But that data doesn't capture all types of femicides, but only those that occur in the context of intimate partner violence. Clearly, we don't have those across the country, so we still have a data gap.

They've been much better at collecting information on women with disabilities and racialized women, because they're extracting data from multiple sources, and it's a multisectoral group, which is quite representative of the public health framework that we support.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Joyal-Pilon or Ms. Richer.

You spoke about how quickly the reach of your services has expanded to reach over 60,000 people.

I want to talk about non-physical abuse. What legislative or policy changes do you think are urgently needed for women who experience non-physical forms of abuse, such as emotional, psychological or economic abuse? Would you like to talk about that?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer:** In terms of the policies that should be put in place, I have to say that the Criminal Code already contains a lot of measures to protect victims. Our problem right now is that they are not always applied.

One example is the breach of conditions. How is it that a person who breaches conditions is not arrested? Why not bring them back before the court so that the situation can be assessed? That person poses a risk. They are at risk of committing another offence.

In the current system, we are short of money and time, among other things. Cases involving domestic violence are often complex, and it is difficult to manage them. We need more police officers and more lawyers. There have to be Crown prosecutors who will have the time to work on the cases and properly analyze what they are going to ask the judge before the accused is released. For example, they can ask whether the wearing of an electronic monitoring bracelet or a risk assessment is necessary. So policies already exist.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses once again for joining us today. It's really unfortunate that we're running out of time.

I'll start by offering my deepest condolences to all those who have lost a woman to femicide, and I know there are some here in the room.

Ms. Richer and Ms. Joyal-Pilon, your opening remarks were very relevant. You've summarized your ideas. You talked about the issue of first-degree murder. You also addressed the matters of breach of conditions, the selection of judges and training. So you've covered the issue.

I want to come back to something.

I also believe that, when it comes to violence against women, we really need to set up a whole system to work on those cases, as you said. We really need to see the system as a whole.

We need to ensure a continuum of services to really be able to help as many women as possible and to ensure that there isn't one more victim.

Could you tell us a bit more about the possibility of using emergency response experts who could provide advice?

**Ms. Élyse Joyal-Pilon:** This brings us back to a number of issues that have been raised today. I think training is key. We need professionals who are familiar with the evidence Ms. Dawson has shared with us. We need to be able to bring in professionals who know the policies, the best practices and the risk factors. Those people will be able to recognize these factors, and they will be able to refer cases to specialized organizations.

We really think that all organizations that work with victims should be able to bring together resource people, specialists who maintain knowledge, and write and disseminate checklists and decision-making aids. This would enable professionals in all organizations to be better equipped, to be aware of and better understand the relevant data to make informed decisions and manage cases that are often very urgent because of existing risk factors.

These professionals could also maintain an up-to-date network of resource people and quickly direct victims who are at high risk to the experts who can weave the famous safety nets we talked about. These are very important when a victim leaves an environment and is in a period where separation is imminent or very recent.

Therefore, we must act quickly and take the appropriate measures in a timely manner. That is why we are thinking of all the organizations that work with victims, not just the specialists. For example, in Quebec, there are rapid response units made up of groups of experts. These cells have been set up over the past two or three years in a number of regions.

We need to set up teams that manage the cases, disseminate knowledge and information and bridge the gap between these groups of experts and the professionals.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

Building on Bill C-21, I agree with you. I think there was a lot of misinformation, particularly with first nations communities and our right to hunt and fish, something that Bill C-21 actually never impacted.

Going back, Madam Zaccour, you spoke about how it's been a year out. The provisions of Bill C-21 have not been implemented. I know that's the responsibility of the government. How urgent is it that we implement it?

**Ms. Suzanne Zaccour:** Earlier today, we were doing a news conference with family members of victims of femicide. We discussed the femicides that have happened since the passing of Bill C-21 and these measures still not being in place. We can't know for sure what would have happened or what could have happened, but we can ask this question: Would some of these women, from the numbers we've heard today, still be alive?

This is a bill that came as a surprise to no one. We've been working on this exact bill for over two years, and the rest of the bill is in place. The measures that received the most input from the women's groups and were amended with work from all parties are the ones that are.... It seems as if they're treated a little bit as secondary, because they're still not in force. We are very concerned. Even if they were to be put into force today, it's already too late. It's extremely urgent. Lives are at stake.

• (1205)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I want to be really clear that this is a personal opinion, but I think part of the reason things are stalling and why we're seeing changes even to immigration laws placing migrant women more at risk from gender-based violence and not being protected is misinformation campaigns by different parties.

I want to ask my last question of Madame Richer or Madame Joyal-Pilon—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but the time—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Oh, it's been.... I asked for 40 minutes. I want to have that on the record, please.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I would like to acknowledge, at this point, that we are moving right along. We're through our first panel, but I know we do have two speakers left.

Is it the will of the room and the witnesses to remain for eight extra minutes, if we allow, for the last two members to have four minutes each instead of five?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Witnesses, are you comfortable with staying an extra eight minutes?

**Voices:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll finish up.

We have MP Ferreri.

You have the floor for four minutes.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you Madam Chair.

Again, thank you to our witnesses for being here. You do incredible work.

There's so much I have to ask. I wish we had hours.

Ms. Dawson, your comment about sons killing their moms was pretty shocking. If you want to, please table with the committee any longitudinal research you have on that or issues that are happening in the home. I think that's the key component when we look at prevention. What could we be doing better in those formative years?

I do want to talk about Bill C-75. Since the passage of that bill in 2019, there have been 84,923 female victims of intimate partner violence. This bill was supposed to reduce that number. However, by 2023, the number increased to 96,415, an increase of almost 14%.

I guess I would ask the lawyers in the room—and I believe those are the two lovely ladies at the end—how do you feel about this bill and the connection between the increase in intimate partner violence and this legislation.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer:** Unfortunately, there are still way too many femicides and much too much violence.

As for what should be done, I would say we need time. We need people on the ground to enforce the measures in place. The weak link right now is the lack of time.

If the Crown attorney's office wants to do a good job, it needs enough prosecutors. Crown prosecutors need to be able to fully examine the case so they can put forward the right arguments in court. They don't have time to do that work fully, because they are inundated with cases.

It's the same for all the groups that work with victims. Again, the key is to be able to provide that safety net to victims. Unfortunately, we don't have the resources to do that.

[English]

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I'm sorry, but I want to give a bit of time to my colleague here.

Of the victims you're working with, how many of their attackers, their abusers, are out on bail?

• (1210)

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Richer:** We don't keep track of that kind of information at our organization.

The attacker is out on bail in a number of cases, but not in the majority of cases, I think it's fair to say.

Of course, we talk about the justice system, because we are lawyers, but many victims are too afraid to go through the system. Although we try to reassure them and restore their faith in the justice system, it can be difficult.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

[English]

I'm going to pass the remainder of my time to my colleague Anna.

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

I have a question for Madame Dawson.

I understand that you received \$10 million in funding, and I want to know if you could explain to the committee what the benefits of your research were. Was it to rehabilitate criminals? Was that the benefit?

Crime against women has gone up, as we know, substantially across this country, by 75% alone this year, so it's important to have that data to help us prevent crime against women. Could you maybe explain to the committee what the funds were used for? Were they used for prevention or for research, or were they used to protect women?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. At this point, for any questions that were posed, please feel free to respond in writing, if you could, because the time is exhausted.

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** I have one brief sentence.

I would like to say that the \$10 million was over the course of my entire career, and you can go to my website to see all our information there. However, I'm happy to provide a written response to that.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** That would be great. If you could just send it to the committee, we would appreciate it.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Damoff, you have the floor for four minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here.

I also want to acknowledge the family here today as well. I had a brief moment to chat with you before the meeting, and I can't imagine that it's been easy sitting through this meeting. Thank you both for being here today.

Ms. Rathjen, I want to start with you. You know that the Conservatives have said that they are going to repeal both Bill C-71 and Bill C-21. Bill C-71 included lifetime background checks for someone to get a firearms licence. It also included a provision to forfeit firearms to the Crown in cases of domestic violence. We've talked about the provisions of Bill C-21.

Please give just a quick answer: Should those bills be repealed?

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Absolutely not, but the implementation of the measures that are already in force should be improved, and the measures in Bill C-21 that aren't yet implemented need to be implemented. There's a lot of work to be done to make sure that they're effectively implemented, because the devil is in the details of the regulations and the implementation protocols, and I think the fight for these measures is far from over.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** You and I have talked about that many times. I know that, on Bill C-21 right now, there's section 35 consultation going on with indigenous peoples before the regulations get introduced.

On the subject of firearms again, Ms. Rathjen, you and I have both been subject to horrific attacks by the gun lobby. I applaud your determination to come out and continue to speak out on issues when you are personally attacked repeatedly, and will probably be even after today's meeting.

Gun control is a women's issue, and we know that women are 500 times more likely to be killed if there are firearms in the home. I couldn't agree more about gun control and gender-based violence being public health issues, but we lack Canadian data on firearms.

Perhaps all the witnesses could weigh in on this. Do you support investment in research to get Canadian data on firearms?

Ms. Dawson, I'll start with you.

**Prof. Myrna Dawson:** Yes, I do support that. Currently, with the increasing lack of transparency around the information released about these killings, we can't even find out their names in many cases. We certainly can't find out what weapon was used and whether it was licensed or not, so we absolutely need better data on this because, otherwise, we're trying to move forward without understanding what the risks are.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you. I'll turn it to NAWL.

**Ms. Suzanne Zaccour:** I would also add that we need to be very careful how we use the data. For example, when we hear this bill passed and then there's an increase in domestic violence or decrease in domestic violence, most incidents of domestic violence are never reported or never disclosed. Sometimes an increase in numbers, depending on how we collect data, is a good thing. It means that more women are disclosing these abuses. Definitely, research needs to be interpreted very carefully.

• (1215)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Go ahead, Ms. Rathjen.

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Yes, absolutely.

One of the big problems is that very often police do not report what weapon was used and whether or not it was legally owned. Sometimes we need to wait until a perpetrator.... For example, in the mass shooting in Moncton, we had to wait for the court—he's alive—to find out that it was a legally owned assault weapon that was used to kill police officers. In terms of domestic violence, the lack of information is even more pervasive.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That concludes our first panel today. On behalf of the committee, I would certainly like to provide a heartfelt thank you to all of you for providing your testimony.

At this point, we will suspend quickly to bring in our second panel of witnesses, and I believe it will not take very long, so don't go too far.

Thank you so much.

• (1215)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1220)

**The Chair:** We are back. I'd like to welcome the officials who are with us today. From the Correctional Service of Canada, we

have Amy Jarrette, deputy commissioner for women, and Kathy Neil, deputy commissioner, indigenous corrections, joining us by video conference.

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

**Ms. Amy Jarrette (Deputy Commissioner for Women, Correctional Service of Canada):** Thank you, Madame Chair.

**The Chair:** I'll start the clock when you start speaking.

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Madam Chair and members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here with you this afternoon to discuss this important issue.

My name is Amy Jarrette, and I am the deputy commissioner for women with the Correctional Service of Canada.

I am pleased to be joined, virtually, by Kathy Neil, who is the deputy commissioner for indigenous corrections.

I have been following this committee's study on gender-based violence and femicides against women, girls and gender-diverse people. Violence in any form, including gender-based violence, is unacceptable, and we do not tolerate it in our institutions or communities. We all know the far-ranging, immediate and long-term consequences of gender-based violence for victims and their families. That is why, while we do not control who enters our custody, it is our responsibility to address the factors that led to criminal behaviour, including gender-based violence.

Throughout your meetings, your committee has discussed with witnesses the importance of ensuring that offenders have the programming appropriate to their level of risk and need. To address gender-based violence, the Correctional Service of Canada screens offenders at intake for suspected intimate partner and/or gender-based violence. Those who meet the initial screening criteria are then provided more in-depth assessment. More specifically, the family violence risk assessment scale and the spousal assault risk assessment scale are used with male offenders.

Results can be used in the development of treatment plans and intensity for interventions, as well as to determine suitability or set conditions for conjugal visits, family visits and temporary absences. Screening also includes a sex offending assessment, which is used for determining the overall rating for the level of intervention and is integral in developing an offender's correctional plan.

For men serving a federal sentence in our custody, whether incarcerated or under supervision in the community, risk factors and needs linked to gender-based and sexual violence are addressed through the integrated correctional program model, as well as indigenous and Inuit streams. All streams include specific programs for offenders who are in custody for sexual offences.

Through these programs, a personalized plan is tailored based on individual needs. Programming seeks to identify and, ultimately, address thoughts, attitudes and behaviours that led individuals to violence, sexual violence and aggression towards others, including current or previous intimate partners. Research has shown positive results for those who have completed integrated correctional program model programming, with significantly lower rates of return to custody for those on conditional release who have completed programming.

While some women offenders are perpetrators of intimate partner violence, the largest proportion of women offenders in our custody, including indigenous women, have themselves been victims of abuse and violence. As a result, programs for women offenders address issues related to those with a history of intimate partner violence, which also considers their trauma. With correctional programming for women, participants explore the connection between conflict in their relationship and their use of problematic behaviours. They also learn the characteristics of abusive and healthy relationships with their partners, families and friends, and explore how to break the violence cycle.

During this study, your committee has also heard about gender-based violence directed towards indigenous women. The Correctional Service of Canada recognizes that indigenous peoples continue to be overrepresented in our criminal justice system, and many of them are survivors of intergenerational trauma. As such, our supports for indigenous offenders seek to rehabilitate them and hold them accountable for their offences in a culturally sensitive manner.

Kathy will be able to respond to questions that you may have about her work with indigenous communities and partners to ensure that essential supports and services are in place for indigenous peoples under our care and custody. This includes working to eliminate barriers to optimize the full use of existing section 81 agreements while expanding the number of organizations benefiting from them. Over the past decade, there has been a steady and substantial improvement in the percentage of indigenous offenders not returning to federal custody within five years of the end of their sentence. Through Kathy's important work, we plan to continue this momentum.

● (1225)

Madam Chair and members of the committee, we are available to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

At this point, I'd like to welcome Anna. You have the floor for six minutes.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for your testimony.

I have a quick question for you, Madame Jarrette.

In your nine years of service with Correctional Services, how many intimate partner violence criminals have you seen in the prison system?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** I can speak to the programs we have in place to address intimate partner violence. Approximately 75% of women offenders are victims of some form of abuse, which may include intimate partner violence. It is something that we are very seized with.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** How many of the individuals who have gone through your system have been able to rehabilitate so that we can ensure that when they are released, the women they've abused feel safe?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Thank you for that question.

One of the best metrics of recidivism is looking at the percentage of offenders who do not return to federal custody five years post-sentence expiry date. I'm pleased to say that that number has been steadily increasing over the last 10 years. As of the last fiscal year, that percentage overall for offenders was 89.9%. It's just shy of 90% of offenders not returning to federal custody five years post-sentence expiry date.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** The reason I ask that question is, last week, we had a compelling witness speak about her aunt, who was killed by a repeat offender who had been let out on conditional bail.

As Conservatives, we repealed parts of Bill C-5, and one of them was on sexual assault. We can't give these individuals house arrest. It does not work. It's been proven that house arrest does not protect women.

Would you agree with that?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Society is best protected when offenders are gradually reintegrated into society under supervised release, rather than at the end of their sentence, with no controls or supports. We have a number of measures in place in order to safely supervise offenders. These include special conditions that can be imposed by the Parole Board and access to community programming and other supports in the community to help them address their risk factors.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** How would you explain that to Esther, whose aunt was killed by this repeat offender who had been let out on conditional bail? There was no accountability taken for him, and he obviously didn't follow the rules.

We've heard a lot at this committee that women feel that if they go and report the crime, the individual... Police have told us numerous times that they arrest the criminals over and over again, and guess what? They get let out on bail.



Women refuse to come forward because they're afraid that if they do, it's only going to make it worse for them.

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** I think this speaks to the broader societal issue. Again, though, I have to come back to our results, which are that almost 90% of offenders are not coming back to federal custody five years postsentence expiry.

In our approach to corrections, public safety is paramount. That is a paramount consideration in the CCRA, and it drives all that we do in Corrections.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** As we all know, we were called back to this committee in the summer because of the urgency of a 75% increase in violence against women. How can we ensure the protection of women if we're not going to hold the criminals accountable?

• (1230)

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Actually, holding criminals accountable is a key component of our correctional planning, and it's key to the approach that the Correctional Service of Canada takes. It is part of the assessment process for offenders that they must demonstrate accountability for their actions. As part of the security assessment, in order for them to be classified to lower levels of security, they need to demonstrate that they are accountable for their actions.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** I recently spoke to an individual—she's asked me not to mention her name, so I'll respect that—from my riding whose mother was continually abused, and the husband was also abusing the children. She reported it to the police. The police came in and arrested the individual. However, because it was, according to them, the first time she had reported it, he was let out on bail. He went back to the home that he had been ordered to not go back to and almost beat the mother to a pulp, along with one of the children, who stepped in to try to save their mother.

How can we protect women from these types of crimes? They're afraid to report them. They're afraid that if they report them, things are going to get worse.

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** CSC is responsible for administering sentences that are imposed by the courts, so we are responsible for only those who enter into our care and custody.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** If this gentleman would have been put into your care or custody and, hopefully, had received your intervention—and it helped him realize what he was doing was wrong—and was let out, do you think that would have prevented him from reoffending?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** I can speak to results.

What I can say is that sex offender programming, as well as violence against an intimate partner, is part of our integrated correctional program model. That model has proven to be successful.

It is evidence-based, and it has reduced the number of offenders. For those who have undergone the ICPM model and have completed it, the numbers returning to custody on conditional release are approximately half of those who don't. It is a model that is based on evidence and has been shown to work.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Damoff, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you.

I want to thank you, as well as Ms. Neil, for being here today. Appointing a deputy commissioner for indigenous people in Corrections was something that I can't tell you how happy I was to see, and it's great to have you here at committee.

I want to talk a bit about coercive control and give you some examples.

Emily O'Brien is a woman who founded Comeback Snacks. She went on a holiday to the Caribbean with her boyfriend at the time, who took her passport and told her that she needed to smuggle drugs back to Canada or she would be staying at the island. He had her passport. She smuggled the drugs. She went to jail. She was caught in mandatory minimums because there was no ability for the judge to give any discretion on her sentencing. She fully acknowledges that she did wrong. She served her time, and she's been doing really well.

I met a woman at Buffalo Sage Healing Lodge who assaulted her abusive partner. She, too, was subject to mandatory minimums and ended up being sentenced to jail.

At the Edmonton institute for women, two women I spoke to had been trafficked by pimps and were selling drugs. Again, mandatory minimums sent them to federal institutions.

I think all of us would agree that coercive control was responsible, and that jail was probably not the best place to send these women. They did commit an offence, but giving them a criminal record and making their lives hard to find housing and a job and everything else when they get released.... I'm proud that we've removed mandatory minimums on sentences like these women got.

You mentioned a bit about coercive control. What kind of programming do you have for women when they're sent to prison and have been in this situation? In my experience, the women I've met are there because of coercive control, addictions or mental health issues.

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Thank you for that.

Our women's correctional programs are designed to be responsive to the unique needs of women, which is in keeping with the key principles of the CCRA.

Both the women offender correctional model and the indigenous stream are in line with the principles that are found in "Creating Choices", a report issued by a task force in 1990 that came up with five key principles that govern women's corrections. For women, they provide a continuum of care right from intake through to sentence expiry. They really help them to improve their skills and knowledge and how to recognize unhealthy relationships and how to build healthy relationships.

Research demonstrates that the IWOC and the WOC have been effective in helping women overcome the issues that brought them into the criminal justice system. We—

• (1235)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm going to stop you there just because I have a couple of other questions I want to get to.

This one is for Ms. Neil, I think.

I want to talk about healing lodges. I distinctly remember one of the women there saying that it was the first time in her life she was able to heal and not just survive. I personally think that we should be putting a lot more investments into healing lodges. We see women leaving there who actually have the life skills to be able to survive on the outside.

I'm just wondering if you could talk a bit about investments that CSC may be making in healing lodges.

**Ms. Kathy Neil (Deputy Commissioner, Indigenous Corrections, Correctional Service of Canada):** Good morning. Thank you for the question. It's nice to see you again.

I'm of the same opinion as you that healing lodges are a key component of CSC's ability to help the rehabilitation of our indigenous people, as well as to support call to action 32, which is to commit to alternative justice measures. In 2017, I believe, CSC amended the funding allocation for healing lodges so that the section 81s would have a fixed rate so that they wouldn't go below a certain rate, in order for us to meet all of their fixed costs on a steady basis, regardless of their bed utilization.

Another significant investment we've made that I think has done very well is at the Okimaw Ohci healing lodge. That program integrates indigenous cultural healing with western medicine. We did add resources there in order to have that integration supported by that band where the healing lodge is located.

In addition to this, as we—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm sorry. I have one last question. Would you be able to send some of those investments to the committee, Ms. Neil, if you don't mind, so that we have them?

I wonder if CSC could provide us with information on CoSA. I don't expect you to necessarily know about the program. It's Circles of Support and Accountability. It's a volunteer organization that has incredible success with sex offenders who are released into the community.

I don't know, Ms. Jarrette, if you have any information on it. Could you perhaps provide us with some information on the work they do?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Absolutely, we will do so. I'm not in a position to provide information at this time. However, I can say that volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization. We have thousands of volunteers who support our mandate, and we could not accomplish it without them. We're very appreciative of the work they do. I think that if we can't bring the offender into the community, bringing individuals from the community into our institutions is a very key part of accomplishing our mandate.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next, we have MP Larouche.

You have the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Ladies, thank you for being here for today's meeting, which falls on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

A variety of organizations work with victims. We've heard repeatedly this morning that people don't have faith in the system.

Quebec released a report about how to rebuild that trust, entitled "*Reb tir la confiance*". We have a long way to go, and rebuilding trust is very much necessary.

Over the years, women have lost faith in the system. They can't come forward to report the violence they are experiencing. The witnesses underscored that point this morning, and I also heard it on the radio this morning. That lack of trust was raised, as was the fact that far too many women do not report the violence they experience.

The lack of data is another issue that was raised. The Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union met with a panel of experts, and I listened to what they had to say. Many of the issues that came up had to do with a lack of data. We don't know the statistics. We don't know exactly how many women do not come forward to report the violence they are experiencing.

We talked about that with the previous panel as well. Because of the lack of data, we don't know where things truly stand with women with disabilities, indigenous women, who are overrepresented, or seniors. That lack of trust is an important factor.

Quebec set up specialized courts that support victims. Quebec also introduced the use of electronic bracelets, which was a recommendation in the "*Reb tir la confiance*" report.

People who work with victims also told us that victims need a safety net.

Ms. Jarrette, what role do you play in the effort to restore victims' trust in the system so that they do come forward about the violence being perpetrated against them? It's about trying to convince them that their concerns have been heard.

• (1240)

[English]

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** I'll try to touch on the key elements.

The first is with respect to confidence in the system and access to information. CSC makes available a range of information about its programs, policies and results. We have an annual departmental results report. We also regularly conduct research, and those results are all publicly available.

With respect to information for victims of crime, we have almost 9,000 individuals who have registered to receive information from the Correctional Service of Canada, and we are committed to providing them timely and relevant information about the offenders who harmed them.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** They're worried about their attacker wanting to get revenge. It's a critical time.

You said that abusers were often abused themselves. That has been proven. We talked about it last week. For example, a major rape trial is under way in France. It, too, has shown that experiencing this kind of trauma perpetuates the violence.

I understand that it's important to work on that trauma. Awareness and education are also paramount. As we speak, women are the targets of hate crimes, misogynistic behaviour and gratuitous violence galore, just because they are women.

How do you see your educational role, which is definitely more and more important?

Do you tend to adopt a therapy-based approach that focuses on past trauma?

I'm trying to get a better sense of the work you do with criminals.

[English]

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Our offender programming does target intimate partner violence, gender-based violence. The integrated correctional program model that we use is an evidence-based approach that directly targets that. Offenders at intake are screened and are assessed on whether or not they are perpetrators of intimate partner violence, or sexual offenders. Then they receive appropriate programming that directly targets those risk factors. That programming has proven to be effective and has results.

I mentioned earlier that those who had received had completed their integrated programming, which includes gender-based violence, have significantly reduced their rates of return to custody when they are on conditional release.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Coercive control is another issue that has been discussed, meaning there is a need to educate people about it.

A bill is currently before Parliament to make coercive control a crime, Bill C-332. It is often argued that the authorities have fewer tools to intervene when coercive control is not criminalized.

What do you think of the bill? What is your view on criminalizing coercive control?

[English]

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** I typically only speak to those who are in our custody and I can say that we have robust processes. Our staff are trained to recognize signs of intimate partner violence and to be able to develop correctional programs that directly target those risk factors and the risk of reoffending.

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Gazan, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

Thank you so much for joining us today, witnesses.

I know that my colleague, Pam Damoff, mentioned some of the demographics of people who are often incarcerated:

About 82% of women in prison are jailed as a result of behaviour related to attempts to cope with poverty, histories of abuse, and addiction and mental health issues that commonly arise from these experiences.

This is from "Policy4Women-Public space, public engagement".

It says:

Indigenous women, most notably, are hyper-responsibilized and then deputized: they are made responsible for their own safety from victimization and for the safety of those for whom they care.

It goes on to say:

If a woman uses force to protect herself or others – especially if a weapon is involved – she will commonly face the full, often disproportionate, weight of the law.

This is speaking more specifically to racialized women, and goes on to say:

The vast majority of women charged for using reactive—usually defensive—force, don't pursue a legal defence and are likely to plead guilty [or take plea bargaining].

This is why I was pleased about some of the changes and amendments for mandatory sentences and dealing with ongoing systemic racism in the justice system.

One of the things I've often spoken about regarding prisons is that it's hard to create pro-social behaviour in anti-social environments. Here, I want to speak particularly to a report by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies on cases of sexual violence within prisons.

In October 2020, the report stated that the Office of the Correctional Investigator conducted a national investigation into sexual coercion and violence in federal corrections. According to the report, Canada is behind when it comes to addressing sexual violence behind bars.

The OCI describes CSC's organizational indifference and lack of leadership in tackling the problem of sexual coercion. It says:

The OCI makes clear recommendations to begin addressing the pervasive issue of sexual coercion and violence inside federal prisons, yet these recommendations were not accepted by the Minister of Public Safety.

This specific report speaks about prisoners having reported instances of sexual violence perpetrated by CSC staff, unwelcome comments, sexual looks, sexual harassment and sexual assault where a survivor did not report the incident for eight months for fear of that reporting having an impact on an upcoming parole hearing. In two of those cases, correctional officers were charged with sexual assault.

When reporting sexual violence, the report also goes on to say that prisoners are often disbelieved or fear retaliation.

It also speaks about the inappropriate use of strip searches. It came up with four recommendations.

What has CSC done to deal with violence that is perpetrated against women and gender-diverse people within penitentiaries?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** The CSC has prioritized the use of correctional programs to reduce the risk of reoffending while increasing safety in communities in the country. Our programming targets factors that are directly linked to the criminal behaviour of offenders to reduce reoffending—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'm sorry. For clarification, I'm talking about violence that's perpetrated by correctional service officers against incarcerated persons.

What has been done to deal with gender-based violence that is being perpetrated by correctional officers?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** We are required to train all staff. In keeping with the CCRA, public safety is of paramount importance. When there is any evidence that staff has behaved inappropriately, it is investigated and appropriate action is taken to address the situation. This can include action up to and including termination, and potentially criminal charges as well, depending on the nature of the incident.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I ask that, because when we're talking about gender-based violence in Manitoba, I recall that there was a young woman who grew up in the child welfare system. We know that there is a high rate of folks with a history in the child welfare system who end up becoming incarcerated, which is very close to what we're talking about: mental health, trauma and all of that. She ended up—and it was on video and it went to the courts—on camera not having a proper response from correction officers. She was from Roseau River, and she ended up dying in prison. We see reports of that.

I've had training on how to teach courses at the Grand Valley Institute, which has been a topic of discussion. I have to say that my experience there as a student, not as somebody who was incarcerated—I want to be really clear on that—was pretty violent. I observed women being treated so violently there that I ended up writing a TED Talk about it. It was that violent.

What's being done to deal with violence against women by correctional officers? It is very violent.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you. Unfortunately, your time is up, Leah.

However, once again, I will remind Ms. Jarrette that, if there's anything that you have been asked during committee that you're unable to answer, please feel free to send any remarks in after the fact.

Before I go on to Ms. Ferreri, instead of doing turns of five and five minutes, are we comfortable with three and three minutes?

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Okay.

MP Ferreri, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses here today from Corrections Canada as we talk about intimate partner violence.

Madam Jarrette, how many programs in men's medium or maximum security prisons are specific to intimate partner violence?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Our model is the integrated correctional program model, and it is part of that program model.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** How many are very specific to intimate partner violence?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** Within the ICPM, we have the main program stream, the indigenous program stream and the Inuit offender stream, and they all address intimate partner violence throughout the program. This can extend—

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Just for clarification, is there no specific program about intimate partner violence?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** There is nothing specific for intimate partner violence. However, there is a sex offender program for both indigenous and non-indigenous people.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Obviously, you can see, based on this committee, that it's pretty concerning when there's this is a massive increase in intimate partner violence and there's no programming for it.

Ms. Jarrette, research shows that therapeutic change, particularly in high-risk offenders, required skilled facilitation by highly trained professionals with a deep understanding of the behavioural issues involved.

What are the academic requirements for corrections officers for them to implement this training?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** I'm sorry, which training are you referring to?

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I'm referring to any of them. For a correctional officer, what training do they get on intimate partner violence as well as addictions—which goes to my colleague's point about addictions?

**Ms. Amy Jarrette:** I'll come back to the programming because of a comment you made about there being no intimate partner violence programming. That's incorrect. There is programming that addresses that through the ICPM. It focuses on domestic and family violence and substance use, among other topics. It's very much part of the program, part of the ICPM.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I'm going to have to cut you off. In dealing with corrections officers on the ground, they would certainly like a lot more training. That is what we're hearing on the ground from a lot of the corrections officers dealing with addictions, and hearing about that.

I am going to move a motion here. I hope to get this done quickly in case of more questions, but it does tie in very much with our witnesses. I am going to be formally moving a motion.

I had the opportunity to tour Grand Valley, like my colleague mentioned, and I had an opportunity to visit the mother-child program that I believe has tremendous merit.

There was recently a documentary, and one of the things was said that really stood out was that when you sentence or incarcerate a mother, you ultimately incarcerate a child. I think that's very true. Making sure that the bond between mother and child is strong and thus prevents recidivism is very, very important, because many of the women, as we've heard, and many people in prison are generationally put there. There's an intersection of issues, 100%. I think that we would all agree that we would want people to come out better than when they go in.

I would like to move forward the following motion, because what I witnessed at Grand Valley, under the mother-child program, was highly concerning, and I think it is up to this committee to at least study it. I got a chance to meet the woman who was in charge of the program. She was lovely. There has been no longitudinal data on this program to date.

• (1255)

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** I have a point of order, Chair. It's been more than three minutes, so can we get to the motion, please.

**The Chair:** Could you speak to your motion, please. Read the motion.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

The motion I would like to move reads:

That the committee undertake a study of no less than three meetings on the Institutional mother-child program, and invite the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Commissioner of Correctional Services Canada, and other witnesses as submitted by committee members.

**The Chair:** MP Damoff, do you wish to speak?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Yes, thank you, Chair.

I want to first thank my colleague for bringing this motion forward.

I have visited the mother-child program twice at Grand Valley. At Buffalo Sage, the former executive director there said that all women benefit from the children who are part of the program when it's running. They also have a program at the Edmonton Institution for Women, which I am incredibly supportive of.

I do find disturbing the click factory put out on social media just to generate outrage about the program with comments like it was "shocking". CSC runs a lot of programs and this is probably one of the best ones they run. Mother-child programs are run in the U.S., India, Kenya, Argentina and Norway.

Most of the women who are in prison are young and are single mothers. In fact, 70% of federally sentenced women are mothers to children under the age of 18. Two-thirds of those mothers are the primary or sole caregivers of their children.

Indigenous women, as my colleague mentioned, are grossly overrepresented in federal corrections. They make up only 4% of the Canadian population, but they represent 41% of all female admissions to federal custody. However, I would note that if you go out west, that number probably rises to 85 to 90%. At Grand Valley, two of the moms whom I met were actually from the west, but we've run out of room in our prisons out west so they were sent to Grand Valley. It's probably one of the best programs that CSC runs.

Just for the record, Chair, the conditions to be part of the program are that the moms are classified as minimum or medium security; that they've been screened against the relevant provincial child welfare registries to verify whether information exists that should be considered in the decision-making process; that the child welfare agency is supportive of their participation, and there's no current assessment from a mental health professional indicating that the mother is incapable of caring—

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I'm sorry, just to save my colleague time, I have no issue with the mom. There's no issue whatsoever. I just wanted to let her know that there are no issues about the mom.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** With all due respect, while you spoke highly of it here, the information that you put out on social media—

**The Chair:** Let's remember to speak through the chair.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm sorry, Chair.

While my colleague spoke highly of it here, what she posted on social media and what her colleague, a fellow MP, posted was not positive whatsoever. Also, moms can't participate if they've been convicted of an offence against a child or an offence that could reasonably be seen as endangering a child, and they're not subject to a court order or other legal requirement prohibiting contact with the child.

I think it's really important to get the actual facts out about the program and not misinformation to just generate outrage. Moms who are part of it are also required to participate in parenting skills training. It's believed that at least 25,000 children in Canada have a mom in prison, and StatsCan's most recent data, from 2011, showed that 48% of children residing in foster care are indigenous and that the majority of those kids have incarcerated moms. Overall, children of incarcerated mothers appear to be subject to more instability both before and after incarceration.

Anyway, Madam Chair, we are very supportive of doing this study. I would like to propose an amendment, however. I will keep one copy....

• (1300)

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** I can distribute that while you talk.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you.

The motion would be amended as follows:

That the committee undertake a study of no less than three meetings on the institutional mother-child program immediately following the conclusion of the study on the rise in violence directed towards 2SLGBTQI+ and invite

(i) the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs,

(ii) the Commissioner of Correctional Services Canada

—and then we've added the following witnesses—

(iii) Emilie Coyle, executive director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

(iv) Senator Kim Pate,

(v) Dr. Ivan Zinger, correctional investigator,

(vi) Dr. Ben Roebuck, ombudsperson for the victims of crime,

(vii) Benjamin Perrin, author,

(viii) Emily O'Brien, founder, Comeback Snacks,

(ix) Marlene Orr, chief executive officer, Native Counselling Services of Alberta,

(x) Sandra Delaronde, Director of Giganawenimaanaanig, and

that the committee reports its findings and recommendations to the House, and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

I'll move the amendment, Chair.

**The Chair:** Would it be prudent of us to indulge both the NDP and the Bloc to include a witness as well?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** We can always add more.

**The Chair:** We can add more.

I'll stick to your amendment.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Yes, my amendment still remains, Chair, and we could add, “and other witnesses as submitted by committee members.”

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** This is something we've done at the public safety and the ethics committees, where we've actually listed witnesses. It doesn't preclude others from being—

**The Chair:** Okay, we have a motion on the table.

First, we have to deal with the amendment. Thank you.

Leah, go ahead.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'm supportive of the amendment and the proposed study. I think it's a very important study, particularly with our current study on gender-based violence, and particularly in Manitoba and the Prairies, where 85% of incarcerated persons—women—were the fastest growing population of incarcerated persons, which is much related to what we spoke about today regarding intergenerational trauma and colonization.

We talk about reconciliation, and we need to reconcile with the consequences it has had, particularly on indigenous and Black communities in this country; as the late Percy Tuesday, a residential school survivor, said, “Prisons are the new residential schools.”

I'm very supportive of the proposed study and how it would help to reunify and heal families.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Oh, Michelle, you were on the speaking list. I'm sorry.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Yes, you forgot me, Chair.

**The Chair:** I did.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

I have no issue with this. I just want to clarify, again, that this has nothing to do with that, and to my colleague's point, I have a message here from Rodney Stafford.

It's the issue of the sex offenders and the child-killers who are sharing the same space as the program. That's never been studied. That's the issue, and I think we have to do due diligence on that.

I agree 100% with everything else. It's very important.

I ran into Terri-Lynne McClintic right outside the mother-child program. I saw it, and maybe it's an unintended consequence of the program, so I'll throw you a bone, but I think that—

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** I have a point of order. I think we're debating the motion.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I'm just responding to what Ms. Damoff said.

**The Chair:** Let's first speak to the amendment. Are we good with the amendment?

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Yes. The only question I have is about there being no less than three meetings.

From a clerk's perspective, regarding “immediately following the conclusion of the study on the rise in violence directed towards”, when is that? Is that the next study?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tina Miller):** Yes, that's the next study.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Is there any appetite to do this study first, just based on what is happening?

Is there any negotiation on that? Do you just want to do it after?

**The Chair:** First, we have Sonia, and then we will go to Andréanne.

• (1305)

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I support my colleague's amendment to the motion. The witnesses she's proposing for the panel have extensive expertise on human rights. We need to hear from them to get a complete picture of the institutional mother-child program.

It's also essential that we go ahead with the study we are doing on violence against the 2SLGBTQ+ community first, because violence against that community is also on the rise.

However, I'm very supportive of the amendment because the data is crucial. We need to see the picture and to see what is there.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Andréanne.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Chair, we are still debating the motion. We have another study scheduled, and we haven't even finished this study. We also have to spend time on reports. It is 1:05.

I may have opted to hold the study, because we have a meeting scheduled. A study is already under way at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We'll see how that turns out.

Our calendar is already pretty full. We have enough work to last us until Christmas. Can we discuss the study being proposed when we come back in January? It can be on the list of potential future studies. A lot can happen between now and January, so I suggest we finish the work currently on our calendar, which is already quite full.

This study could be added to the list of proposals. The subcommittee could discuss all this. If the committee does do a study, I'll have to come up with a list of potential witnesses. It's 1:05, and I didn't have time to properly consider the proposed amendment.

I propose we refer the debate on future studies to the subcommittee. We can discuss this then.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We will go to Michelle and then to Pam.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I have a suggestion to do them concurrently. One of the issues that also came up when I was in Grand Valley was coercive control within the prison, between inmates. It was also a major issue that I could see us overlapping with the 2SLGBTQ+ study. I'm wondering if there's an appetite to do them concurrently.

**The Chair:** Next we have Pam and then Leah.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thanks.

I know we're short on time. I agree with Madame Larouche that we need to finish the work that's already been approved, which means that we're going to do gender-based violence and femicide, and the LGBTQ2S+ community study. We will get those reports done, and then we can do this really important study.

I don't think this would preclude finishing what we're already doing. There's nothing in the motion on it. That's why I added "following the conclusion of" the next study. I'm going to leave the amendment as is, but the intention is certainly that we will finish the work that's on the table.

It would be in the new year, I would suspect, before we're able to get to witnesses on this study.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Leah.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'm of the same mind, that we finish what's on the calendar and that it happens after the 2SLGBTQ+ study.

I don't think we should run it at the same time. The study on the mother-child program is very fragile and sensitive, particularly for communities that are more highly represented in the justice system. I think it's important that we are trauma-informed and sensitive when we're doing that study, and that it happen all at once after the 2SLGBTQ+ study.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I think we're landed there.

At this point, I would like to thank our officials....

**An hon. member:** We should vote.

**The Chair:** We should vote. I was just making the assumption that we had happy heads.

All in favour...as amended?

Thank you.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm sorry, but were we voting on the amendment first? Now we have to vote on the motion as amended.

**The Chair:** Let's try this.

All in favour of the amendment as presented?

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** All in favour of the amended motion?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** I'm going to start again by thanking our officials. I certainly appreciate your testimony for the study today.

I remind members on your way out that the Wednesday time slot will be an informal meeting with a delegation of women from the Ukrainian parliament, and the second half will be the remaining GBV witnesses. Information will be going out for everyone today or tomorrow. Are there any questions?

Go ahead, Pam.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Is the National Police Federation coming on Wednesday?

**The Chair:** I would have to check.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** It was on the witness list. I think I put it in as well as someone else. • (1310)

**The Chair:** It includes the ombudsperson.

**The Chair:** I'll check, once I adjourn.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** No, I meant the National Police Federation.

The meeting is adjourned.

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