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Chair: Marilyn Gladu



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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 10 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are all attending in the room today, so, as you know, wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

If you're looking for interpretation, you can select it on your device. If you wish to speak, please raise your hand.

I'll give a reminder to address all comments through the chair.

Each of our witnesses will speak for five minutes, and then we will begin rounds of questions. Each side will have a certain number of minutes. When you have one minute left, you will see the yellow card. When you have 30 seconds left, you will see the red card. Then I will be ever so gentle when I cut you off after 30 seconds.

In considering today's topic, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by committee on Monday, September 15, 2025, the committee will commence its study of section 810 of the Criminal Code and women's safety.

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

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses.

In person, we have Debbie Henderson, who is here as an individual, and we have Harmy Mendoza, who is the executive director of WomanACT.

Thank you both for being with us.

We'll begin with Ms. Henderson.

Debbie Henderson (As an Individual): I'm here today to talk about the preventable death of my niece, Bailey McCourt, a mother of two, who was brutally murdered by her former partner, James Plover. Bailey's death is a devastating example of how our justice

system continues to fail victims of intimate partner violence, IPV, even after they do everything right.

Bailey was in an abusive relationship with James. Over time, the abuse escalated until one day he strangled her, an act that experts recognize as one of the strongest predictors of future homicide. He threatened to kill her and her daughters and even assaulted her while she held their two-year-old child.

Bailey did what victims are told to do: She reported the assault, and he was criminally charged.

On July 4, 2025, James Plover was found guilty of all charges, but instead of being taken into custody, he was released while awaiting sentencing. There were no safety guards, no GPS monitoring, no alert system—just a piece of paper with conditions of no contact.

That same day, three hours later, he found her at work, rammed her vehicle, pulled her out....

I'm sorry....

• (1535)

The Chair: It's okay. Take your time. We know this is so difficult.

Debbie Henderson: He bludgeoned her with a hammer in broad daylight in a parking lot.

This happened after his conviction, after the justice system had already confirmed that he was dangerous.

Bailey should have been protected. Instead, the system relied on the honour system, expecting a convicted abuser to simply follow the rules. That's not reasonable and that's not protection.

We need to move from promises to protection. A peace bond or a no-contact order tells an offender what not to do, but it does not tell us when they're not following it until it's too late.

GPS monitoring changes that. It turns a piece of paper into real-time protection. With geofencing, instant alerts could go to police and to victims, and they would be notified the moment an offender entered a restricted zone, such as home, school or work. This technology transforms our system from reactive to proactive. Instead of waiting for harm, authorities can respond the instant an offender breaches a restricted area. Victims have a chance to find a safe place and contact the authorities. Evidence shows that breaches drop when offenders know that they're being tracked. It creates accountability and it deters crime.

Victims of intimate partner violence deserve more than words on paper. They deserve protection by technology, enforcement and real consequences.

A peace bond is a promise; GPS monitoring is protection. It's time we give victims more than paper. It's time we give them a chance to live and to take back a sense of control and safety in their own environments. If an app such as Snapchat can track your friends' whereabouts, we can certainly figure out how to apply that technology to help save lives.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I want to say that we're so sorry for your loss. Thank you for sharing that.

We'll now go to Ms. Mendoza.

Harmy Mendoza (Executive Director, WomanACT): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to all members of the committee.

My name is Harmy Mendoza. I am the executive director of WomanACT, a Toronto-based charitable organization dedicated to ending gender-based violence and advancing gender equity through systems change.

I want to thank the committee for its ongoing leadership in examining how legislative reforms can better protect women and children from violence.

Intimate partner violence remains an epidemic in Ontario and across Canada. We continue to see preventable femicides, each representing a life lost due to systemic failures.

Since November 2024, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses has confirmed 35 femicides, with nearly 60% involving an intimate partner or family member.

Just last week, and this was actually 10 minutes from my house, Savannah Kulla, a young mother of four, was murdered by her former partner while he was out on bail for serious firearms charges related to her. Savannah's death was preventable.

It highlights the urgent need for reforms that prioritize risk assessment, survivor safety and accountability in our justice system.

The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee has found that 71% of the 515 domestic homicides in Ontario involved a known history of intimate partner violence. We must act on these warning signs before tragedy strikes.

Section 810 of the Criminal Code, which allows for peace bonds, was meant to be a preventive tool, yet its effectiveness remains inconsistent, and survivors face significant barriers.

For example, peace bonds are short-term, typically 12 months, when risk often persists for much longer. The burden of application frequently falls on survivors who are navigating a complex legal system while managing trauma and safety risks. Peace bonds often conflict with family court or child protection orders, leaving dangerous gaps in protection.

To strengthen section 810, reforms should extend duration and improve enforcement, supported by wraparound services like housing, financial aid and safety planning, especially at work; integrate social and economic supports, alongside legal protections, because safety depends not only on court orders but also on survivors' stability and independence; and align peace conditions across criminal, family and child protection systems for consistency and clarity. This will save lives.

Bill C-75 made important strides by recognizing IPV as an aggravating factor and introducing reverse onus provisions for repeat offenders.

However, implementation remains uneven. Survivors are often not informed of bail outcomes, and conditions are inconsistently enforced. Too often, decisions still prioritize the liberty of the accused over survivor safety, sometimes with devastating consequences, as we saw with Savannah's case.

We need stricter bail reform, paired with better coordination—that is very important—across justice, social service and community sectors. Legislation alone cannot prevent violence without consistent survivor-centred application.

Across all legislative areas, we need data that is survivor-centred; disaggregated by gender, race and immigration status; and focused on outcomes, not just processes.

• (1540)

Canada still lacks a legal definition of intimate partner violence in the Criminal Code. Establishing one, as seen in the U.K. and Australia, would provide consistency and accountability across systems.

Ultimately, safety must be at the heart of our justice reforms. Survivors should not have to navigate fragmented systems or depend on luck for protection. By embedding trauma-informed, survivor-centred and evidence-based practices, we can move forward to a future where no woman or child lives in fear of violence.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I would be pleased to take any questions from the committee.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to move into the questions. We'll go from one party to the next. I'll let them know how long they have, but we have lots of time.

We're going to start with the Conservatives and Madame Vien for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon, colleagues.

I'd like to welcome our two witnesses.

We know just how difficult it is to talk about these issues. This committee has looked at very sensitive matters of intimate partner violence multiple times. The topic is always heartbreaking.

I'd like to provide some background on why we chose to initiate this study.

It's common knowledge that Bill C-5 and Bill C-75 did not turn out the way the government had envisioned. It was quite the opposite. Last week, the Minister of Justice tabled his Bill C-14 to improve the situation slightly. In his reading of the facts, the minister acknowledged that acts of violence in Canada had increased by 41%. Violent crime has increased by 55% in 10 years, homicides by 29%, and sexual assaults by 76%. That's why we initiated this study.

I don't need to remind you of the alarming rise in femicides in Canada. Quebec is dealing with a similar situation. If I remember correctly, there have been around 15 femicides so far.

Ms. Henderson, you have shared disturbing testimony, and you have also proposed solutions. We've done some research, obviously. You mentioned that you'd like to see an offender registry implemented. I think that's an interesting solution. I believe the committee could do well to have more information on what this registry could look like and the type of information it would collect.

I have a couple of questions for you, and I hope we'll have enough time for you to answer them.

How would this registry strengthen the protection of women?

What could have saved your niece?

• (1545)

[*English*]

Debbie Henderson: I'm sorry. I don't understand the first question.

The Chair: Is your translation working okay for you?

Debbie Henderson: I'm just wondering—

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: Ms. Henderson, if my information is accurate, you're recommending the implementation—

[*English*]

The Chair: Hang on. We'll stop the clock for a minute.

I think we need some help with Ms. Henderson's translation.

Is it working? Okay.

I'll give you another minute, Dominique, to repeat your question.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Henderson, did you understand what I said earlier or would you like me to repeat my question?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, you should restate it, I think.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: Is it working now?

[*English*]

Debbie Henderson: It keeps trailing out. I could hear it, and then it trails out and I can't hear the rest of it.

The Chair: Can the technician see what can be done to get the sound to be the same all of the time?

We'll try it again, and if you can't hear Dominique when she's asking the question, just let me know.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: I won't repeat my full opening remarks, Ms. Henderson, but I'd like to thank you for sharing your heartfelt and insightful testimony. You've also shared some recommendations. You spoke about GPS monitoring as well as the implementation of an intimate violence partner registry.

First, what would this registry look like exactly, and what data should it collect? In your opinion, how would such a registry make a difference when it comes to women's safety?

Second, in terms of legislation, if things had been different, given that criminals are released on bail and others serve their sentences at home, what could have saved your niece?

[*English*]

Debbie Henderson: In terms of a registry, I think it would be empowering to women to be able to look up whether there is a history of domestic violence. You could actually look at that. We have a sex offender registry that you can look at and you will know.

Certainly, if I had children, I wouldn't want to be around those individuals. If somebody has a history of domestic abuse, you would at least be making an informed choice, for the most part, regarding your relationship with them. I think that's one thing. Obviously, you'd have to collect data and have a trial run of something like that to see how effective it is. We're obviously seeing that with Bill C-75 as well. We've had the trial run, and there are some glitches.

In terms of what I think could have saved my niece, I think that's multifactorial. If you take a look at the information provided, she was strangled, and that's a clear indicator of high risk for future homicide. I don't believe that he should have been released. He was released on July 4. It almost looks like he was getting summer vacation before his sentencing. If he had been held, Bailey would still be alive. If there had been GPS monitoring, with alerts, Bailey would still be alive. She was surprised at her workplace. He rammed his vehicle into her car when she was arriving back from lunch.

I do think that those are important things to look at.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we're going to go to Ms. Khalid for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you very much to our witnesses. I really appreciate that you've taken the time to share your very personal and heartfelt testimony here today.

My sincerest condolences, Ms. Henderson, for your loss.

I'll start with you. As you were going through this experience, what was the support system like from the local police?

Debbie Henderson: Are you talking about after Bailey was murdered?

Iqra Khalid: Yes.

Debbie Henderson: I would say that the local police were as supportive as they could be. They are limited on what information they can share with us so that it doesn't interfere with their investigation, but they were supportive in terms of connecting with victim services and that type of thing.

Iqra Khalid: Prior to your niece's murder, how involved were the local police with incidents that may have happened beforehand?

Debbie Henderson: I can't speak to that. I'm not sure how involved they were with Bailey specifically. I do know that she reached out for help.

Iqra Khalid: Tell us a bit about the GPS monitoring system that you have spoken about. What do you envision that system to be like and who would that be governed or regulated by?

Debbie Henderson: With the GPS monitoring, I think that ideally it would have some form of a system that would go back to local authorities. If somebody is breaching an area where they should not be, then the police are notified and can do something about it.

It's the same with an alert that goes to the victim. With a piece of paper, you're just walking around in your community not knowing where the perpetrator is, and I would say, instead of not knowing, that you have nowhere safe, because it's a surprise all the time.

I assume it would be monitored somehow. I don't know if you would have a national system set up. There are people who are more involved in technology than I am. I'm just a victim's family member. I do know that my phone has the ability to track my friends, and I can locate my family. I know that my friends can geofence their dogs on their property. I would assume that people with much more understanding of technology than I have could assist with that.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

All of the provinces administer justice. At the federal level, we are responsible for creating the laws, which are administered, then, by each of the provinces across Canada. Creating a system like a GPS monitoring system would be something that provincial governments would be responsible for.

Ms. Mendoza, you spoke about tracking data and monitoring. Can you elaborate on that a bit? How can tracking that data inform policy?

Harmy Mendoza: I would assume that for any type of changes you want to make, you want to make them evidence based. You want to make sure they have worked, maybe in countries similar to Canada.

For any country, province or municipality that wants to be serious about the changes they're making, I would hope that we could collect information about how the current policies and procedures are or are not working. There are experts in those areas. Canada has a lot of very good top-of-the-world universities and researchers.

My own agency has only seven full-time staff. We are already going into community-based research and trying to collect, with our very own fundraised resources, information about how current procedures are impacting women.

WomanACT works with women with lived experience. We have a pool of women who have experienced abuse. Every time there is a change—it could be from the federal government, provincial government or municipality—we immediately consult and we start looking for and collecting information about the gaps. What is working and what is not working? I think that is a key crucial component of any changes you want to make.

Make sure that you work with those experts in the area, those who are providing services, but also with those who are monitoring different changes, so that the changes you are implementing do not have unintended consequences. You cannot do this alone. You have to do it with the other levels of government.

• (1555)

Iqra Khalid: Ms. Mendoza, just following—

The Chair: You're out of time. I'm sorry.

You'll get another round. Fear not.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much to our two witnesses for coming here today.

Ms. Henderson, I'd like to join with the other members of the committee to offer you my condolences. This type of testimony moves us deeply every time. I remind myself that we conduct these studies in honour of all those who have lost their lives to violence. This is an issue that shocks us deeply.

You spoke about multiple early warning signs and events that happened with your niece. There were a number of them. The person who murdered your niece exerted coercive control over her throughout their relationship and ensnared her in a web. Do you think action could have been taken earlier if the Criminal Code recognized coercive control and had a broader definition of violence?

This morning, I spoke about this issue with representatives from an organization that focuses on ending violence against women. I'll get back to the study on section 810 later.

[*English*]

Debbie Henderson: I would agree with that. I would hope that there would have been, but I also think there's not enough information or education out there for women.

I think that when you get caught up in a situation with someone who is very charismatic and very charming, it can be confusing as well, in thinking that “maybe I did something wrong here” and taking some of the blame, and not really recognizing it, because it's inside your own home. It might come out to the outside, but it's inside your own home.

I think there needs to be more information on coercive control and more education for women about it so that they have a greater understanding of what's going on.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Ms. Henderson.

Ms. Mendoza, many witnesses have said that the process of reporting peace bond violations under section 810 of the Criminal Code is intimidating, lengthy and offers little support. Based on what you see, what discourages women the most from seeking peace bonds?

[*English*]

Harmy Mendoza: There are so many things. I don't know if I'm going to be able to answer your question, but I'm going to add a layer of complexity that will shine some light on the importance of collaboration between the different levels of government.

You are standing, maybe in a shelter or at a friend's house, and you have a peace bond that was given to you by our criminal system. Then there is the abuser, showing up with the police because he has an access order from the provincial family legal system. You have that, and you may even have the police in front of you. The police are going to be confused. I know that I am going to be confused if I have a peace bond and a protection order that is contradicting the other order.

The reason I want to say this is that once you go through that experience, you know that having a document that doesn't have any process attached to it doesn't really do much. On top of that, when you have contradictory orders, that makes things next to impossible. You're confused. You're at risk. Now your child needs to go with the abuser, but you have this other order that doesn't really help you.

What I'm trying to say here is, yes, having a process that is fast and clear could help, but we also must have other areas that need to be attached to this order, as I mentioned: wraparound services and VAW experts supporting the victim.

Ms. Henderson just spoke about the situations that happen at workplaces. Risk assessments at workplaces must be done, just like risk assessments at home must be done, because they will save lives, because the issue is preventable and because the signs are clear for the victim, the family and the friends.

It's a complex issue. Like I said before, I guess what I want to draw to your attention is that it's important to have a fast, clear process when it comes to the area of your jurisdictions, but if I could, I will just do a bit of an ask about exploring how to align this work with other areas. Education and training are absolutely important.

Coercive control doesn't have to be physical, and it's lethal.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we're going to go to Frank Caputo for five minutes.

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's really great to be here. I believe this is quite possibly the first time I've subbed in on this committee, and it really is an honour to be here today. I wish I was here under different circumstances.

I've spoken about my past work in the House of Commons far too much, but one thing I will highlight is that just before I was elected, I was in charge of the file of a young woman who was killed. It was a charge of second-degree murder that went to manslaughter.

I want to mention her name because her name was forgotten. In fact, funding for the police investigation came because she had been missing for 20 years. It came through the missing and murdered indigenous women funding. Through those initiatives, there was funding for an undercover operation. Her name was Angel Fehr. Her killer is actually out of jail already and, according to the media and parole decisions, has a really bad attitude. I'm sure that's no solace to the family. Angel was seven months pregnant, I believe, at the time she was killed.

This is something that is of considerable importance to me, and I don't want to use all my time talking. It was against that backdrop, and also with my prior experience in intimate partner violence, that I drafted a bill. I drafted it mostly in the last session, but when Bailey was tragically murdered, I added a few things. I'm going to ask Ms. Henderson a bit about that.

Thank you very much, Ms. Mendoza, for being here.

I don't live too far from Ms. Henderson. In full disclosure, I met with the family about a week ago.

I'm going to ask you about Bill C-225, which is a private member's bill that I've put forward on intimate partner violence to create the offence of assault of intimate partner and to make murder of an intimate partner first-degree murder, among other things, and to create a risk assessment at any point in the proceedings.

Ms. Henderson, your family has asked me to name this "Bailey's Law".

Please, the floor is yours on this point.

• (1605)

Debbie Henderson: We did ask you to name this "Bailey's Law".

After Bailey was murdered, we drafted a letter and talked about the things we would like to see changed. Keep in mind that we're being thrust into this. This is not something that we've spent years looking at. It's new to us and we're trying to learn about all the pieces and to put things together.

One of the important things for our family—I'm sorry. I'm going to get tearful about it—

The Chair: Take your time. It's okay.

Debbie Henderson: —is the first-degree murder charges. I don't know if any of you have lost a family member to murder, but it's absolutely gut-wrenching and horrifying. What makes it worse is to think that this man who murdered her has second-degree murder

charges. This behaviour went on before. This behaviour led to her being murdered. It wasn't something that he just did—a crime of passion, a momentary lapse of judgment. His behaviour before, how he treated Bailey before, how he threatened to kill her and the girls before.... It was all there, and we're sitting here stressed, when we've never experienced this kind of stress in our lives, wondering why he hasn't been charged with first-degree murder. Found guilty of first-degree murder, he would spend more time in prison.

I'll say that that's justice because that's all that we can get. It's not justice enough for us. We've lost a family member, a mother, and we have to live with that. We hope that with Bill C-225.... We fully support it. We were thrilled to see that this piece was in there. We're thrilled to see the GPS monitoring in there, as well as the risk assessment. You know, the ability to step in and potentially stop something—hey, eyes are on you—seems very logical, practical and reasonable to us.

Frank Caputo: Okay, thank you.

I don't know if there's a GPS provision, but a judge could order that as part of the risk assessment.

You have 15 more seconds if you want to add anything else.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

We're going to move along, then, to Madame Ménard for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard (Hochelaga—Rosemont-Est, Lib.): Ms. Henderson, I commend you for your courage in coming here today.

It's difficult to ask you questions because we're wholeheartedly behind you. You're likely going through the most difficult period of your life, and I think that all the members of the committee recognize that. All of us wish you didn't have to go through this.

During this period, what do you and members of your family need?

[*English*]

Debbie Henderson: We need change, and we need change to happen fast. We need to see that the system cares and that the system is willing to do what it can as quickly as possible. We've seen some other bills being presented with regard to hate speech on the Internet. We see that—okay, that's fair—but we're not seeing lives being lost in such a way because of something that was just said on the Internet. I'd like to see stats on that if there's anything different from what I've looked up.

Every five to six days in Canada, somebody loses their life to intimate partner violence. To me, those stats, which I didn't know about beforehand, are staggering and gut-wrenching. Every time we see on the news that another human being has been murdered, it breaks our heart. To be quite frank, it makes us lose our faith in our government and the justice system. We want to see swift action. This is so important. This is Canada, not a third world country. Let's get together. It's a non-partisan issue; it's a human issue. I would personally like to see people coming together to come up with the best solutions together. I think that there are some that are on the table.

Our family is hoping for support for those bills.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Ms. Henderson, this is a difficult time for you, as it is for other families of victims. You talked about education and awareness.

Might it be beneficial to provide some support for families navigating such a difficult time?

[English]

Debbie Henderson: Absolutely, there could be better support. I think until you go through a situation like this you don't have an appreciation for how complicated it is. There are so many different factors that come into play.

ICBC is involved because he drove into Bailey's vehicle. There is a need to understand rules in estates. Family law comes into play. Criminal law comes into play.

I used to be a nurse. I can speak that language well. I don't speak another language very well, because that's not my area of expertise. When you're thrust into that, you are trying to learn quickly and figure it out. I know that victim services is very supportive, but there are a lot of gaps at play. There needs to be more support around that.

There are a lot of financial issues as well. You save for your retirement, but you don't realize that you're going to have to spend your retirement on legal costs because somebody brutally murdered your family member.

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Ms. Mendoza, your work has equipped you with on-the-ground experience. You also have colleagues throughout the country. What would help prevent violence?

Could we one day have a world where gender-based violence will be reduced and families, such as the family of Ms. Henderson, will not have to go through a similar experience?

What do you envisage in terms of prevention resources?

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: That's certainly the hope and the fire that drives my work every day. When I go to work every day, I hope that I will not have a job the next day because that will be the day when we will not hear that a woman has been killed in the context of intimate partner violence.

Can it be eliminated? I believe it can.

I believe it is complex. I believe it will take efforts that are related to, like I said, all the different levels of government, all the different divisions from the municipalities, all the different ministries from the provincial government and all the different departments in the federal government.

We need to prevent—

The Chair: Thank you very much. I am sorry; we must go to the next MP.

[Translation]

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Henderson, I'd like to go over some of the things you spoke about. One of the solutions you presented involved the issue of GPS monitoring. I'd like to go back to electronic bracelets. There are few proactive offender monitoring mechanisms. Do you think electronic bracelets or mandatory tracking could make a difference?

Quebec has introduced electronic bracelets, and the federal government would also like to pursue that option. What improvements can be made?

[English]

Debbie Henderson: I'm not familiar with the e-bracelet. This is the first I'm hearing of it. I don't know specifically how they work.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: The solution you're suggesting is to track offenders through the use of GPS monitoring. In your opinion, it is one of the practical ways to track offenders.

What could be done to ensure better tracking?

[English]

Debbie Henderson: Aside from the GPS monitoring? In addition to...? I don't know.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Mendoza, would you like to add anything as far as electronic bracelets are concerned?

You're nodding, so I'll give you time to supplement the answer if you're familiar with electronic bracelets. How can this technology be improved?

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: I would hope that they would help to keep victims safe. I would also add some other suggestions, like, for example, second responders programs, whereby victim workers team up with the police. That's an idea right there that I know you probably have heard about.

We talk about risk and mortality assessment. We talk about co-location of DV workers within police stations, for example, and also, provision for perpetrators' programs. We have to engage those who are using violence to ensure they make better choices.

In Toronto, we have specialized DV courts that are very important in making sure that we provide the best support services for victims who have had to go through the courts.

It is important, I think, but it shouldn't be considered the one and only thing. There should be other attached supports for victims.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to Ms. Roberts for five minutes..

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

Thank you to both witnesses. This is a very important study.

I'm going to start with Ms. Henderson.

I want to thank you for your courage. You made a few statements, and I'd like to go back to them. You said, "We need change and we need change to happen fast."

As we know, intimate partner violence has increased by up to 76%, a number that hasn't been seen for many years. Would you say that bail doesn't work for women?

Debbie Henderson: It appears that way, yes.

Anna Roberts: Would you also agree that we need to do a better job of ensuring that we keep women safe by ensuring that these individuals...? Especially in your niece's case, who was brutally choked and almost died the first time, would you agree that this individual, this man, should not have been let out of jail, that he should not have been given bail?

Debbie Henderson: I agree with that.

Anna Roberts: She would have been alive today.

Debbie Henderson: I agree with that.

Anna Roberts: The other thing you mentioned was that one in five...women loses her life...every day. It is an emotional situation, and I have to tell you that for one of the witnesses we had a few years ago, who almost lost her life, her perpetrator got off because of the Jordan rule.

Do you feel that in situations like this the Jordan rule should not apply because we need to speed up? You said that we need to be faster. Do you agree that we need to eliminate that for these particular situations when a woman has been abused more than once?

Debbie Henderson: Yes, I would agree with that.

Anna Roberts: Mrs. Mendoza, thank you for your work.

You mentioned the bracelets and the monitoring system. You said that is one way that we could help to protect women. All of us parliamentarians carry a panic button. Would you agree that having a bracelet and having the survivor carry a panic button would create more of a safety net for the women?

Harmy Mendoza: I agree, yes.

Anna Roberts: Okay.

Mrs. Mendoza, you spoke about children. You spoke about the abuse they struggle with and said that nobody pays attention to them. I'm not sure if you remember Kari's law, when a child spoke over and over again, both through the justice system and through

the social work system, to say that she feared for her life and did not want unsupervised visits with her father, from what I recall.

Unfortunately, that child died because nobody would listen to her. Would you say that we, as parliamentarians, need to do a better job of putting the law in place to protect these children?

• (1620)

Harmy Mendoza: Absolutely, and I guess the part that is clear to me is that whoever is authorizing visitations is not speaking with the ones who are probably overseeing criminal behaviour from perpetrators. We have this big gap, and we end up with our children or our women in the community being killed in the context of IPV.

There needs to be more coordination. There needs to be some way to ensure that we are looking at safety when authorizing visits within our family law system in the different provinces in Canada.

Anna Roberts: I don't think that we have done a good job in the justice system. We can look back. I remember a case, in 1977, where the visitation wasn't properly mandated. It wasn't properly supervised, and the father ended up killing his four children and his wife, before he shot himself, and the house went up in flames. I see this repeating over and over again. Here we go again.

What do we need to do to ensure that these perpetrators, who are going to cause death, do not have access to their families and children? How do we change the law, as Ms. Henderson said? How do we speed it up? How do we make people realize how important intimate partner violence is?

Harmy Mendoza: Start by talking to each other. Talk to people in the provincial system. They are in charge of an important area of keeping women and families safe in Canada.

I know that some of the witnesses spoke about a GBV commissioner. That would be very important to add accountability to all the different legislation you're changing and to make sure that you have information that is coming from the ground as to how the changes are affecting this. Make evidence-based decisions when you come to different legislation changes. Collect data that is appropriate and that is disaggregated so that you know how it's impacting your communities.

This is an issue that is preventable. We can prevent it, and we have virtually no funding to prevent it. We need to also educate. The justice system is one part of the continuum. If we're able to prevent and to talk to our younger generations about the importance of healthy relationships, we are doing a lot of good work, and we need to evaluate how much that campaign or that prevention strategy is working for our communities and for our country. It's complex; it's big.

Once again, to bring it to your point—and I get that this is the holistic jurisdiction and that this is what we need to do—I would agree that we haven't done a very good job because we need to start looking at this from a different perspective, a perspective that is bigger than us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Since that took a little more time, I will add time as well to each of the other parties.

We're going now to Ms. Nathan for six minutes.

Juanita Nathan (Pickering—Brooklin, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Henderson, for being here to advocate for your niece. I am sincerely sorry for what your family had to experience. Nobody should go through that.

I just want to talk a bit about her life prior to when she called the police. Do you know if that was the first time she called the police or if she had called the police before?

Debbie Henderson: The first time when he was charged with a threat.... I actually don't know the answer to that.

Juanita Nathan: Okay. What about the family members? Did you know that abuse was going on in her family? Had she made any reference to that in the immediate family, like to her mom, or to siblings or to anybody?

Debbie Henderson: I know she had conversations with her sister, her father and her stepmother.

● (1625)

Juanita Nathan: Were there other organizations like Ms. Mendoza's organization that she had to reach out to, or did she go outside of the family for help at all?

Debbie Henderson: I can't speak to that necessarily. I know she was well connected in the community to a program called Mamas for Mamas, but I don't know the ins and outs of that program.

Juanita Nathan: I was a domestic abuse worker for 20 years, so I know that women take a long time to reach out for help. For them to call the police, the statistics say that, on average, they would have been abused 27 times before they would even call the police the first time.

I just wanted to find that out and also find out how receptive women are to seeking help in these situations. A lot of women are dependent on their partners for child minding and for finances and things like that. It can take them a long time to seek help, and the families don't really see what happens at all.

I know that you talked about what could be beneficial. There are a lot of times when the partners abuse, and they are charged. When they come out, the families will go through the CAS system or the child protection services system. Even if you call the police one time, they will be involved, and they would make recommendations. Was there ever a recommendation such as that?

Debbie Henderson: I can't speak to that. I'm not sure.

Juanita Nathan: They could also do some safety planning and assessments for that.

After the murder, are they involved with the children?

Debbie Henderson: Yes.

Juanita Nathan: They are involved with the children. They are in custody, and things like that.

Is there anything you could recommend for the CSA system? That's also one of the many systems involved with the justice system as a supportive victims service. Are all these systems supporting your family now?

Debbie Henderson: Yes, there are multiple systems that have victims services. The Ministry of Children and Family Development has been involved. Again, they're only able to help within their capacity, so things that we're dealing with now.... For example, Bailey's oldest daughter had a different father, who won't let our family have access to her. Automatically, by default, even though he wasn't her primary caregiver, he got custody of her. Now we don't have any access to her.

Our family would like to look at adopting the youngest. Well, we're limited in that. I'm ignorant. I had no idea. I assumed James would lose all rights once found guilty, and that's not the case. I made the assumption. To me, it makes sense. It seems logical. He also threatened her life before, and she just happened to not be with Bailey at the time. Would he have killed his daughter as well? It's very concerning to think that someone who can take a life is deemed capable of having any sort of legal tie to, or responsibility for, a child. He'd have to grant permission for our family to adopt.

I'm trying to learn all that stuff, figure that stuff out and push for changes as needed.

Juanita Nathan: I understand. It's a very complex system. Only when you get into it do you figure it out. Each situation is unique and very different, but we are trying to get to the best process we can.

Thank you for coming here to talk to us today.

Thank you, Ms. Mendoza, for being here.

Harmy Mendoza: Am I allowed to say something?

The Chair: Yes, you have 30 seconds.

Harmy Mendoza: You asked a question about children's aid societies.

They're very important and a key component of the system's response. Integrate a domestic violence team into each child protection service. The correlation between women's abuse and child abuse is very strong. If you don't have child protection service workers who are able to identify and establish risk assessments appropriate to the situation of the family, you have a big gap as well. In Toronto, one of the four children's aid societies has implemented one. They are tracking really good results around that and are working very closely with the VAW sector.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Larouche, I am going to give you an extra minute.

You have the floor for three and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for both witnesses.

A number of my colleagues talked about the Jordan decision earlier. What we have realized is that the Jordan decision prompted faster case handling, driven by concerns that delays could result in cases being dismissed entirely.

Do you think that in practice, this ultimately shifts some of the pressure toward temporary measures, such as peace bonds signed before a judge, but it doesn't really ensure effective follow-up?

Ms. Henderson, you're nodding. You can go first, if you'd like to comment on actual monitoring.

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: My gut response is that they don't ensure safety. You have these cases going through fast, but what happens with the ones that don't get through? We might be looking at unintended consequences in terms of that particular case. It is important to ensure there are risk assessments included in each one of these cases, and it is important that there are services attached to each one of these families.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Risk assessment is a key element. I talked about it with representatives of the organization I met earlier. Each case is unique. It's important to differentiate between an individual who is likely to reoffend from someone who may have had a moment of mental distress.

How can risk assessment be improved to identify persons that pose a genuine risk of reoffending in order to sentence or to track them adequately?

What could be done in this regard? What's missing?

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: There are two things. For risk assessments, there are a lot of tools out there. A lot of them are evidence-based and they have been proven to work. A lot of them are used by the justice system, including by the police. The violence against women sector has developed its own risk assessments and is in the early stages of evaluating them.

There is one important step in the risk assessment that is key. The follow-up is that safety planning. It needs to exist and it needs to be done by violence against women experts, so you can have one for work and one for home.

Imagine that a victim has the courage to leave her abuser today. She's probably going to go to a friend's home, or maybe a shelter if there is one somewhere. The following day, the place she is going to, which the abuser knows, is work. The abuser knows the victim is going to be there the following day at 9 a.m. That's similar to what happened with Bailey.

Workplaces have a responsibility to ensure safety. There is something to say about ensuring that employers also play a role in preventing lethality. When I speak about risk assessment, I am also speaking about safety planning and how we, as communities, have

a role to play within the context of the different jurisdictions and the different employment legislation in different provinces—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're out of time for Madame Larouche.

Next, we're going to Ms. Cody.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you both for coming to the committee today.

Ms. Henderson, I'm truly sorry for your loss. My deepest condolences go to you and your family at this most difficult time. I can't imagine what it is like to be here and talk to everyone about what you have gone through in your family. You have great courage, and I thank you for being here.

With the past changes to laws, we've seen mandatory minimum sentences removed for several serious offences. From your family's perspective, do you believe that lighter sentencing or reduced accountability play a role in any way in allowing women to continue to be at a greater risk?

• (1635)

Debbie Henderson: I think lighter sentencing does. You need consequences to your actions. If consequences aren't strong enough, where's the deterrent?

Connie Cody: If I could, I'll get both of your perspectives on this. I've heard from several people that these justice reforms have weakened deterrence and emboldened repeat abusers. What message do you think this sends to those seeking protection, and what should we do to strengthen protection to change the outcomes?

Harmy Mendoza: I can speak a bit about what I know in terms of recidivism and abusers using violent behaviours again and again.

In Ontario, there is a very important researcher, Katreana Scott. Her work is about perpetrators and those who use intimate partner violence. She has developed a high-risk model for offenders, so that they no longer choose to...use violence or reduce the use of violence. It has shown us a lot of important data. The reason I'm mentioning it is that this particular model has been replicated in different parts of the world, I believe. In Canada, this model has not been implemented or funded at all.

As to the importance of the justice system, absolutely, a strong justice system that has important key consequences for those who choose to use violence, yes, but the truth is that you are only going to lock them up for so many years. We need long-term solutions. Once this abuser stops engaging with one family... I think her study... I apologize. The last time I read her research was a long time ago, but I remember some of findings and how these offenders would touch up to nine families in their lifetimes.

The justice system has an important role to play and so does intervention for perpetrators and those who use violence, because they're going to come out of jail. They're going to be out in the community. Having some knowledge is important. It's also important that our younger generations do identify red flags, that we talk about healthy relationships and that we start very early, that we don't wait until it's too late for us to intervene. We need to prevent it, instead of dealing with the consequences of it.

Connie Cody: Thank you for that.

Do you believe the current list of conditions that can be applied as part of bail orders is adequate? In your opinion, should judges have the option to impose more conditions? If so, what are some conditions that you might like to see?

Harmy Mendoza: Well, I know that some of the witnesses who came here before we did spoke about making judges justify the rationale behind not ordering a condition. That makes sense. It is important to keep victims safe.

I am unable to speak of the specific conditions in terms of the different individual complex cases, but I guess that it would be a good idea to ensure there is training for the justice system, including judges, in terms of IPV, and also to ask them to justify a rationale for the lack of conditions, as requested by the victim.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you. That's your time.

Now we're going to go to Ms. Fancy for five minutes.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to first also say thank you, as we all have today, for your courage in coming, Ms. Henderson.

I am from Nova Scotia, where in the past year, unfortunately—Ms. Mendoza is nodding her head; she knows what I'm going to discuss—we've had eight different violence-related offences, either intimate partner violence or gender-based violence. In my riding specifically, we've had four. It's unfortunate that we're here discussing this, but this is the important work, so I really commend you for helping us do that important work.

In Nova Scotia, we have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic since 2021. With there being a provincial epidemic, I want to highlight rural vulnerability. A lot of what we've talked about today has been from an urban lens, but I want to talk about, and ask Ms. Mendoza about, the geographic isolation that women from rural areas tend to have, as well as fewer policing resources. My riding, South Shore—St. Margarets, is predominantly rural. I'm asking these questions for people in my riding. They're also limited in terms of access to transportation, which also compounds that risk for women who are trying to leave violent situations.

In your beginning remarks, Ms. Mendoza, you talked about the prevention piece. Then we talked about the during piece, and the bill we've discussed today is the after piece. I'd like to look at it with a rural lens, please. How women act has long been emphasized in prevention and education. You talked about the education piece earlier today. What preventative measures do you believe are the most effective? We said that there are some prevention mea-

asures. It would be wonderful if you could give us some exemplars that are effective in reducing intimate partner and gender-based violence. How do we see our provinces working with us? We talked about how the provinces need to step up or how the provinces need to do whatnot, so I'm looking for exemplars in that regard, please.

Harmy Mendoza: I really like your question, and I truly wish that I had specific numbers. I love data, and I love numbers. I would love to tell you that, I don't know, 90% of individuals who have undertaken any of our prevention strategies have changed their behaviour—something like that. We are way too early at WomanACT to give you that type of example or that specific answer. However, I could speak about the fact that, at WomanACT, we started to talk about the importance of talking to those who are not, I'm going to call them, usual partners or usual suspects. We talk a lot with the police and the health system. I can go on for hours talking about that, just to give you examples of the different pieces.

We started to knock at the doors of, for example, the STEM sector to talk about the context of workplace harassment or intimate partner violence and how employers could play a role in supporting victims and preventing it. It has taken us to so many different places where we're learning a lot about how HR policies are an important component with regard to support and prevention. You have to do that tactfully, mindfully and also with really good legal eyes as to your responsibilities as an employer.

We have now been working with different sectors, including, for example, the department that works with the military, to talk about healthy relationships with young cadets. It's important; it's a start. It's just the beginning of a very small, tiny, little piece of work. We are integrating evaluative components into it because we want to know to what extent it has made a difference.

The other important area of education and prevention is raising awareness, through campaigns that could get us talking about the importance of language, for example. WomanACT launched a petition two weeks ago, asking our communities to help us ask Amazon to take down a descriptor of men's tank tops as “wife beaters”. In this age, I cannot believe that I'm spending time asking Amazon to do that. Nine out of the 10 third party vendors took it down. Language is important. It makes an important impact on the way that we culturally see violence against women. I'm happy to tell you that if you look for “wife beater tank tops”, you're going to find only one vendor. It's a small thing, but it is important. If we don't express how dangerous that type of language is with our young people, with our neighbours and with our family members....

I guess this is all to say that it's complex and that it varies.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you. That's your time.

Harmy Mendoza: I'm sorry. I'm always over time.

The Chair: No, your information is fabulous, and we appreciate it. I'm just supposed to kindly lead us along.

Madame Vien, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to remind you of a recent event that took place in Quebec.

Ms. Gabie Renaud was murdered on September 7 last year in a case of domestic violence. Her ex-partner was arrested. He had committed acts of domestic violence for about 20 years and had violated bail conditions about 16 times. That gives you an idea of the situation. Unfortunately, this happens across Canada. As members of the Conservative Party, we believe it's important to remember that victims come first.

I'd also like to thank my two colleagues Mr. Brock and Mr. Caputo, former crown prosecutors who are here this afternoon to see our work and to help us come up with better legislation.

Bill C-14 was tabled last week by the Minister of Justice, and he admitted that the criminality index in Canada had gone up by 41%.

Some of the elements in Bill C-14, and two in particular, are problematic. The first one is the principle of restraint, which you're no doubt familiar with. This principle allows accused persons to be released on the least onerous terms as soon as reasonably possible, which lets out dangerous repeat offenders. The second one is the fact that we're not going back to minimum sentences, as was the case before the changes that were introduced by Bill C-5.

Ms. Henderson, what is more important for you, the principle of restraint or priority on protecting the public?

[*English*]

Debbie Henderson: That's an easy one: Protect the public. It's a no-brainer.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: Ms. Mendoza, what do you think about that?

[*English*]

Harmy Mendoza: It's advantages and disadvantages, in a way. I don't want to get partisan. I want to tell you that, for me, it's about making decisions that are proven to work. We should be looking at this so we can save people's lives.

You're asking for a specific bill. I would say, what's the evidence? Have you collected any evidence on the changes? What do you have out there so you can make the best possible decision?

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: Ms. Henderson, your proposal on the creation of a registry for domestic violence offenders has been brought up by others as well. The Renaud family, which I have just told you about, has also called for a registry of offenders. By the way, the family organized a public walk of solidarity two weekends ago, I think.

Take the case of women, Madam Chair. When you meet someone, it takes a long time to verify their background through court records, and the information is not easy to navigate.

Ms. Mendoza, I'd like to hear your opinion on Ms. Henderson's recommendation. Would you agree with the creation of a registry? What should it collect?

• (1650)

[*English*]

Harmy Mendoza: It could be part of the overall set of tools, options and supports that a victim and a family can access. That could definitely help and enhance safety for victims.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: Perfect, thank you.

I just have enough time to thank you for meeting with us today. I'm not sure I'll get another chance to ask more, but I know my colleagues have a lot of questions for you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very good.

Now we have Ms. Khalid for five minutes.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

Again, thank you for taking the time to speak with us today.

I want to talk to you a bit, Ms. Mendoza, about Bill C-14. I'm not sure if you've had the time to review it. It would bring in bail reform, and it would put in a reverse onus when it comes to bail.

With your expertise, tell us a bit about that. Do you feel that a reverse onus would help protect women as they are trying to flee gender-based violence?

Harmy Mendoza: It would probably be helpful, because they are not going to be put in the hot seat to come up with a certain level of evidence or whatnot. It might be helpful, but I want to reiterate the importance of the other areas that are key in keeping this family safe. How do we ensure that the changes we are implementing do not have unintended consequences?

Let's talk about that, but let's also talk about contradicting restraining orders. They are also important. I don't want to undermine the importance of one bill or another. I'm trying to say let's not lose sight of the complexity of what women are living and experiencing out there. Families and victims of violence have to walk through a series of complexities and intersecting systems that are not communicating with each other, and that is making things very hard.

Let's look at that and let's look at the unintended consequences of our decisions.

Iqra Khalid: What I'm hearing you say, Ms. Mendoza, is it's not just about writing the law; it's also about the implementation, enforcement and education combined to make sure that women are safe. Am I correct?

Harmy Mendoza: You are paraphrasing what I'm saying—I feel like a broken record—but yes, that's exactly what I'm talking about.

I want to be mindful and respectful of your different jurisdictions and priorities. For those of us who are living out there and facing our clients, it's a no-brainer. I get it. For you, it's different. You have to navigate your own structures, jurisdictions and so forth, but we want to know when we are going to see the jurisdictions collaborating with each other to address this huge gap that is killing women and children.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much. I can hear the passion in your voice. I feel it all the way over here. I appreciate it.

Ms. Henderson, how do you feel about what Ms. Mendoza is proposing with respect to addressing the issues we're talking about today?

Debbie Henderson: I have concerns about the reverse onus. What are the hurdles someone has to go over to prove that they are safe to go out into the community? That part seems very vague to me, and it's very concerning. People should understand that and know the ins and outs of it.

I also have some concerns about letting somebody out under the least onerous restrictions at the earliest opportunity. How would those interplay? It's hard for me to—

Iqra Khalid: Let me clarify that. With a reverse onus, the defendant would have to prove that they should be let out. The status quo would be keeping them in jail. They would have to prove that they should be let out while they are waiting for trial. That's a reverse onus.

Debbie Henderson: Great. How would they do that? What would the criteria be for that?

Iqra Khalid: They would have to prove at a bail hearing that they should be allowed to go out into society, as opposed to what the current law says and what the Supreme Court has mandated. The current status quo is that people should be let out unless they are, based on the judge's ruling, too dangerous to be let out. In that case, they should be remanded until their trial.

This bill is proposing that the status quo be changed so that they would be kept in jail and they would have to prove that they should be allowed out. It's the reverse. That's what Bill C-14 is proposing.

Ms. Mendoza has put in some very important recommendations today about all levels of government and civil society coming together to make a fulsome approach to combat gender-based violence.

What are your thoughts on this approach so far?

● (1655)

The Chair: That's the end of your time. I'm sorry. The witness will get a chance to say some more.

I'm looking at the clock and I think we have time for one more round.

We'll go to Ms. Roberts for five minutes.

Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, thank you both for your courage.

You like numbers and statistics, so I'm going to bring up some numbers for us to digest today—

The Chair: Excuse me for one moment.

Madame Larouche, what happened in the last go-round was that I missed the order. I put you ahead of Connie and Jessica, the people who were supposed to go next. That's why it looks like you're not getting a round. You will get a round. After Madame Ménard, you will get your time.

Anna Roberts: Do I get my time back?

The Chair: Yes.

Anna Roberts: Thank you.

Here are some stats. On January 14, 2023, 13 letters were sent to the previous prime minister, Prime Minister Trudeau, from the premiers to toughen the law on bail reform.

Let's look at what has just recently happened. In Brampton a man was out on bail and he killed his partner. He'd also had other charges previously, in 2023, made by the partner. Nobody took that extra step to realize that this man was violent and he also owned firearms. We talk about firearms. We didn't do our job to protect this woman. The first thing we should have done, if we talk about reverse onus, was to never let this guy out on bail. He should have stayed in jail until the trial.

In 2022, 184 women and girls were killed violently, primarily by men. In Canada in 2022, there were 117,093 victims of intimate partner violence aged 12 years and older, and 78% of the victims and survivors of police-reported intimate partner violence in 2022 were women and girls.

It takes me back, to think of this. We've been talking about this bail reform since I've been in Parliament.

I like what you said earlier, Ms. Mendoza: We have to do something really quickly. They're working like a bunch of snails. We have to get this through, because if we don't get this through, women are going to continue to be killed. How do we justify the laws if we don't implement them a lot quicker to protect the women and children of our country?

I'll ask you both the same question: What message do you think we have to send to make sure we change it now?

Harmy Mendoza: Implement the changes using evidence that they work. If you don't have data, make sure you collect it so that you know they are working—

Anna Roberts: I just collected the data. It's not working.

Harmy Mendoza: I mean data about what you're going to implement. Yes, you've collected data of what was implemented before, but if you make a change today, you need to know if it's working, how much it's working and for whom it is working. If we look at indigenous women or women with precarious immigration status, they deal with a different layer of situations and complexities. Once you know how that's working, keep in contact with community and service providers. They can alert you of the different changes and how they are being implemented in our communities.

Anna Roberts: I have limited time. I agree with what you're saying and I appreciate that, but let me tell you that there's also a cultural situation in this country. We heard from a witness who had her husband charged with intimate partner violence. She told us of her father's comments to her: "You bring shame to this family. I would rather be carrying you out and burying you than having the shame of you putting your husband in jail."

So when you talk about education, yes, I agree that we need to change that. These are the Canadian rules. These are the Canadian laws. You either live by them or you don't set foot in this country.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but I had to bring that out. I remember the look on this survivor's face when she came here to testify. It was very emotional for me and for her.

Ms. Henderson, do you agree that we have to stop talking and start acting so that bail reform can protect more women before it escalates out of control?

• (1700)

Debbie Henderson: Absolutely. As a family member of a victim, my priority is not having an individual get out on bail. That is not my priority. How is that our priority, getting you as a criminal out on bail? You've committed a crime, likely repeatedly—it's likely that all of it's not documented—and now we don't have a family member. Two children don't have a mother. I couldn't care less about you getting bail, to be honest.

I'm sorry if that's emotional, but I feel like you would all feel that way if you lost a family member too.

Anna Roberts: I guess I get passionate about it. I apologize for my passion, but one of my colleagues was killed by someone who was out on bail and was here illegally. We did absolutely nothing to save her. It shouldn't happen and it's continuing to happen. It scares the living Jesus out of me that we are sitting idle, listening to all these witnesses and doing nothing about it.

The Chair: Yes, it certainly is urgent.

That is the end of your time. I'm sorry.

Now we'll go to Madame Ménard for five minutes.

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Ms. Henderson, you said that this issue should transcend party lines, and I couldn't agree more. I think what brings us together in this room is the need to take urgent action so that survivors are better protected and their families are better supported.

However, urgent action carries the risk that proposals may not hold up in court, leaving victims without support.

Ms. Mendoza, would you be concerned if a bill were drafted without consultation or after consulting a single group?

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: I'm sorry. You got cut off at the end. I couldn't hear the very last part.

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: There's absolutely no need to apologize.

Is it enough to consult only one group of experts to draft a bill?

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: No. I think we need to have a broad consultation, always.

I would like to add that cultural-specific or ethnic-specific issues must be considered. Violence against women happens in every culture, in every country in the world. It happens in English Canada. It happens in French Canada. It happens everywhere and in every class. That is very important for me to say because I want to make sure it is clear that we're looking at an issue that does not discriminate.

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: We've not spoken about this specific scenario, but let's imagine that a woman is assaulted by her partner, she defends herself, and this leads to the partner's death. This is a matter of self-defence.

In your opinion, would a bill that would criminalize this woman be problematic?

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: That's a very important and heavy question.

I really don't feel comfortable speaking about specific cases because they are so complex. I would need to have more information.

What I can tell you about those cases, in my experience, is that it's always important to consider the primary aggressor's behaviour, which means asking what the pattern is. Who has been abusing whom by way of a pattern? That is important to consider in a situation, especially if the person was defending herself because, otherwise, she would have been killed.

That is a key consideration in cases like this, in my opinion.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Ms. Henderson, do you have anything to add on this self-defence scenario?

[English]

Debbie Henderson: Do we not have laws that protect somebody when they are acting in self-defence? I would be very concerned if the justice system couldn't differentiate between a partner being brutally murdered by a perpetrator versus a victim protecting themselves. If the system can't figure that out... I feel this undermines our justice system. The Crown has the burden to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it was not self-defence.

That's my thought on that.

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Ms. Mendoza, I'd like to hear your opinion on my colleague Ms. Khalid's question about co-operation and work between the provinces, community groups and the federal government, obviously, given that the Criminal Code is a federal piece of legislation.

You had a good momentum going, so I'll give you the few seconds I have left.

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: Yes, absolutely. I don't want to, in any case, sound like I don't appreciate the complexity of the different systems that you have to navigate from your own areas of work or priorities as parties.

The issue is not partisan. It shouldn't be partisan. It should be about keeping our communities safer and eliminating once and for all gender-based violence.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have Madame Larouche for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I'd like to thank our two witnesses for their contribution today. They've really clarified this study and I hope it will lead to concrete solutions. That's what I'm aiming for.

Quebec has a report entitled "*Rebâtir la confiance*" and it puts forward very practical proposals, including specialized courts and electronic bracelets. The federal government should emulate this last point. Since the criminalization of coercive control falls under the Criminal Code, federal members were asked to examine this subject.

Ms. Mendoza, in your opening remarks, you talked about the legal recognition of intimate partner violence. Were you talking about another matter which is before this committee, that of recognizing femicide in the Criminal Code? If so, could that change something?

[English]

Harmy Mendoza: Absolutely. If we can recognize femicide, it could be very helpful, not only in terms of the law but also for all of us who are watching closely to see what the priority of this government is. I would absolutely agree with you.

I also will talk about the fact that Canada does not have a legal definition of IPV in the Criminal Code.

They both would be absolutely helpful.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Henderson, in closing, I'll let you answer one or two questions. The first question is this: Do you have any suggestions for the committee about how the federal government could provide better coordination between the police, the courts and services to victims? This is a complex program that requires a holistic vision. That means that a number of groups must improve communication and strengthen coordination.

The second question is this: If federal members could carry out just one reform, which one would it be?

I'll leave it to you to decide which of these questions you'd prefer to answer. Can you tell us how to improve coordination between stakeholders, or can you give us one recommendation?

[English]

Debbie Henderson: I think it would be great if there were just one point person for each family going through this kind of thing, to help them navigate the system and all the ins and outs of it, instead of having to go to this person for this and that person for that.

You have to tee it up yourself, all while bawling your face off, you know, and trying to navigate, in our situation, funeral stuff. There are just so many different balls in your court, and you're expected to juggle 20 different things. I can't even juggle three.

I think that if there were a way to implement something like that for victims it would be helpful.

• (1710)

The Chair: Excellent.

For our last two questioners, we'll go to Ms. Cody for five minutes and then Ms. Nathan for five minutes.

Connie Cody: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I wanted to ask you this, Ms. Henderson, in regard to the reverse onus of proof. It's a procedure that would require the defendant to demonstrate that he can actually be released within the current laws. He would have to present a release plan.

The judge would rule after assessing this plan. Don't you think that this is basically just a procedure that would change nothing and that dangerous people would still be released?

Debbie Henderson: I do worry that dangerous people can still be released. I'm not fully confident in this. I mean, can you do 10 jumping jacks or five? What are the criteria that you have to meet to be released?

I am just not feeling confident in it, and I don't feel confident in the fact that there's potentially a life at risk. That's the most important thing that we have on earth in our daily lives: a human life.

I don't feel very confident in what I know of what has been put forward. I just don't know what the criteria are. Maybe if I knew what the criteria are, I might support something like that, but I don't, at this point, know how many jumping jacks it will take, for lack of a better example.

Connie Cody: With regard to everything that has happened—the unfortunate experience you had to go through—if the government had invested massively in mental health services and housing, which is something a lot of people are demanding, would that have been enough to protect Bailey in the moment her aggressor was prematurely released after their conviction?

Debbie Henderson: No, it would not have, in this situation. I don't see how that would have saved Bailey's life.

Connie Cody: Ms. Mendoza, it's been said that a peace bond is nothing more than a piece of paper. I think that resonates with a lot of people. It's been said that they are short-term, not properly enforced and don't have a lot of follow-up.

For peace bonds to be more than paper and to actually carry weight, would extending their duration for serious or repeat cases of intimate partner violence—perhaps up to two years—create a real window of safety for victims?

Beyond length of time, would adding stronger federal standards—such as a mandatory Crown review before a bond expires or automatic notification if conditions are breached—make a difference in giving families confidence that they are being protected by the system?

Harmy Mendoza: I would agree with that.

Again, I will add a few other areas.

I spoke about perpetrator programming. I spoke about one researcher who has developed a model that works for perpetrators. The model has shown that perpetrators change their behaviour after they go through it. It's been proven.

This would be instead of, for example, a mandatory program like Ontario's partner assault response, PAR, program. That's for 12 weeks now. It used to be for 15 weeks. It shrank because of funding constraints. We don't know to what extent the PAR program works. We don't know if it works for one specific set of abusers more than another. We can have some assumptions. Common sense will tell us that, probably, more time would be helpful because the legal justice system's process takes a lot of time.

However, without proper data collection and evaluation of the changes, I'm afraid I can't even begin to point out the areas that need to be watched more closely, changed or improved, or where we go back to the drawing table and rework it again. We just don't have that right now.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now the last round of questions goes to Ms. Nathan.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Mendoza, I didn't get a chance to talk to you last time, so I thought I would start with you.

Can you tell me a bit about the type of women your agency sees? Can you comment on what percentage of them talk about reuniting with the perpetrator and the difficulties they talk about when they are separated?

Harmy Mendoza: The agency I work for does not provide direct client services. We work with women survivors. We have a whole curriculum to make sure they become peer researchers. That is through our community-based research curriculum.

However, I have experience working on the front line, as you mentioned. I used to be a violence against women shelter worker. I coordinated a few housing programs. What I can tell you is that some women want to go back to their abuser, and they have the right to do that.

I talked about the complexity of things. Why are we not engaging perpetrators so they change their behaviour and the way they use violence? The chances are that—like I said and as it's been proven—if a woman doesn't want to go back to him, the perpetrator will likely touch another nine families. That's what I last remember. I may be wrong. I guess what I'm trying to say is that some women do go back. They have the right to go back. Why is that? There are many reasons. They want their children to grow up with their father. They love this person. It happens. For us, it's about the different options this person has so she remains safe within the choice she made.

You asked a question about child protection services. They get involved. They get engaged the minute the justice system is engaged. How are child protection services prepared to support this type of family? There is violence against a woman, so they call in domestic violence teams, which have been proven to work. It's a bit of a collocation system, where you have the VAW expert and the child protection expert working together to support this family in order to prevent any lethality for them because, yes, some victims go back.

Juanita Nathan: I know the judges have the right to mandate people to take part in PAR programs. As such, because they are mandated programs, a lot of the times you don't get to see the results that you want to see.

At the same time, the children's aid societies cannot mandate someone to attend an anger management program or a PAR program. Do you think, if the children's aid societies could do that, it would help the situation? They can only make recommendations; they cannot make them attend a program.

Harmy Mendoza: I can talk about the Toronto Children's Aid Society. They do recommend, if that's the case, that abusers take the caring dads program. I know that they have integrated some level of evaluation and that it has been helpful.

Every one of our different sectors, divisions and Crown operations has a lot to contribute to this big, complex support service provision.

Juanita Nathan: Can you think of any negative effect or any mitigating factor that may affect an IPV registry, such as having an electronic bracelet or even making intimate partner violence a first-degree murder classification?

Harmy Mendoza: I can't, off the top of my head, right now.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you.

In talking about rehabilitation for men, looking at anger or whatever the causes are for intimate partner violence, we have to understand that, when we make a law, it would apply to everyone equally. It won't apply to women separately and men separately. We talk a lot about abusive men, but there are situations where women do get caught in this, and they go through the system. Sometimes they don't have the supports for this, including the translation.

Having said that, what type of rehabilitation...? We talked about the PAR, and we talked about the CAS. There are healthy relationship programs in schools, where they start to teach them.... Also, there's a workplace safety mandate in some provinces, Ontario included. The workplace has to keep the employees safe from violence and from intimate partner violence. Some workplaces have a protocol that you must go through training every month, for the women.

• (1720)

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're at the end of our time.

I would invite the witnesses, if you have a response to Ms. Nathan's question, to send the answers to the clerk.

This will conclude our panel for today.

I want to give a heartfelt thanks to both of the witnesses appearing today. You're very brave, very courageous. Thank you for the work that you're doing.

For the members, before we adjourn, there are a couple of house-keeping items I want to bring to your attention.

The first one is that the Minister of Women and Gender Equality is coming on Monday. We have a budget of \$500 to approve for that.

As well, there is a supplementary budget for our gender-based violence, for another \$500.

Does the committee agree to adopt these budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's very good. You're very co-operative.

Now, on briefs, there are a lot of people interested in this study. I would suggest that we should open this up for briefs, but the translation constraints of timing are a lot. I would like to spare our analysts.

What I'm going to suggest is that we allow briefs that do not exceed two pages, which is about 1,000 words, and that we give people until November 28. That's after we've heard all of our witnesses, and another couple of days, so all of that testimony and those briefs can be incorporated in the final report.

Do I have the committee's approval?

Ms. Khalid, please go ahead.

Iqra Khalid: I'm just wondering about the deadline on the written briefs. Let's say somebody submits it on the last day, which is November 28. It would take some time for translation. Would that delay our report-writing process?

The Chair: No. The analysts will take the testimony, which goes up to November 26, and do their version one of the report. Then it's going to take until mid-December, at the earliest, I would think. It's not going to delay it. It'll be incorporated.

Iqra Khalid: In that case, I'm okay with it.

The Chair: Is everyone in favour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you so much for your good work today.

Thank you to our witnesses.

There's one more thing. Does the committee agree that, in relation to this study, the clerk and the analysts of the committee, in consultation with the chair, will prepare a news release for publication on the committee's website to invite the public to submit briefs?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Very good.

With that, I adjourn the meeting.

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