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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Pursuant to the order adopted by the House on Wednesday, January 28, 2026, the committee is resuming its study of Bill C-225, an act to amend the Criminal Code.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders.

I have a couple of reminders for the benefit of the members and witnesses here today.

Please wait until I call you by name and recognize you before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic when speaking, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking. You can choose the language of your choice on Zoom at the bottom of the screen.

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

As you know, we're going through rounds of questions. When you have one minute left, you'll get the one-minute yellow card. When you have 30 seconds left, you'll get the 30-second red card. Then, ever so gently, I'll cut you off.

Before we begin, I would like to provide a trigger warning.

We will be discussing experiences related to intimate partner violence. 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 members of Parliament, it's important to recognize that these are very difficult conversations. Let's try to be compassionate.

Now I will welcome our witnesses for the first panel.

[Translation]

First we have Sabrina Nadeau, managing director of the association À cœur d'homme – Réseau d'aide aux hommes pour une société sans violence.

[English]

From the National Police Federation, we have Brian Sauvé, who is the president.

Welcome.

[Translation]

We will start with opening remarks.

Ms. Nadeau, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Sabrina Nadeau (Managing Director, À cœur d'homme – Réseau d'aide aux hommes pour une société sans violence): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I want to start by thanking you for inviting me to appear as part of your study on Bill C-225. I sincerely applaud any private member's bill that seeks to make people, especially women, safer.

I started out as a lawyer more than 30 years ago, at the Attorney General of Quebec's office. For five years, I dealt with dozens of cases involving family and intimate partner violence. I saw scared women who wanted to withdraw their complaint or refused to testify for fear of retaliation. Even then, the burden of proof and the responsibility for their own protection was often on them.

At the same time, I joined the board of directors of an organization that helps abusive men. That was a revelation, because finally, the source of the problem was being addressed. I volunteered there for more than 20 years and was a group worker for six years.

Today, I have the honour of running the À cœur d'homme network, made up of 32 organizations across Quebec. The network works directly with men to prevent them from reoffending and end the violence.

I'm also involved in a committee that examines domestic violence deaths, overseen by the Quebec coroner's office.

Allow me to highlight a couple of compelling facts about spousal homicide. First, in nearly 30% of cases, the first—and only—manifestation of physical violence is the killing of the victim. Second, in nearly 90% of cases, the victim experiences coercive control before or after separating from the abusive spouse.

In light of those facts, I applaud the intent behind Bill C-225. Automatically designating an intimate partner homicide as first-degree murder, regardless of premeditation, may seem logical. Indeed, the research shows that the majority of spousal homicides are not impulsive acts. They are thought out and planned—the ultimate act of control.

However, as drafted, the bill raises some legitimate concerns, which have already been brought to your attention. Accordingly, a victim defending themselves against their attacker could face a disproportionate burden of proof. For that reason, I respectfully submit that introducing a single specific offence criminalizing coercive control would be preferable.

While that may seem surprising, coming from an organization that works with perpetrators of violence, the proposal is very much in line with our values. To recognize coercive control is to place the responsibility for the violence on the perpetrator and hold them accountable for the consequences of their actions.

Similarly, I don't think it's necessary to create new offences. The existing provisions are sufficient, provided that when acts such as assault, harassment and intimidation occur within a dynamic of coercive control, they be considered aggravating factors. These situations must lead to harsher sentences, as well as psychosocial follow-up that is both rigorous and accessible. Services must be provided at every opportunity in order to break the cycle. There is no point in making a list of problematic behaviours, because perpetrators adapt and break the rules. That is why comprehensive, consistent and inclusive legislation is necessary.

Furthermore, I fully support the provisions requiring a judge to rule on the release of an accused repeat offender. The court's ability to order a risk assessment is also critical, but probation officers or criminologists should be the ones to conduct the assessment, rather than doctors. Probation officers and criminologists have the expertise to identify the dynamics of violence and to quickly refer perpetrators to the right resources.

In closing, I want to point out that the risk factors for spousal homicide have been long been identified in the scientific literature. Prevention depends on all stakeholders truly working together, across the justice, health, public safety and social service systems.

Quebec has made significant progress, but resources are waning, staff don't have enough time and budgets are shrinking, while the number of victims coming forward skyrockets. It is paramount that the Government of Canada continue to support the provinces and the organizations on the ground, those working every day to support victims, hold perpetrators accountable and make communities safer. We have a collective responsibility to take consistent and courageous measures, because another victim is one too many.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Nadeau.

[*English*]

Mr. Sauvé, you have the floor for five minutes.

Brian Sauvé (President, National Police Federation): Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Bill C-225.

My name is Brian Sauvé. I'm a member of the RCMP and president of the National Police Federation, the union that represents about 20,000 members of the RCMP across Canada and internationally.

I'd like to begin by expressing my deepest sympathies to the McCourt family in whose honour Bailey's law is named.

The tragic circumstances of Bailey's death highlight the need for stronger tools to prevent similar tragedies in the future. Our members see, far too often, the devastating consequences of intimate partner violence. This bill represents an important opportunity to help prevent such harm and improve how police respond to intimate partner violence across the country.

From a policing perspective, several provisions in Bill C-225 would have operational impacts, starting with the extension of evidence retention under section 490. Currently, our members have a three-month window before seeking court approval to retain seized items. Extending that period to one year would bring administrative relief, allowing members to stay focused on investigations rather than filing repeated extension applications. For more complex investigations, particularly those involving digital evidence or forensic analysis, a one-year retention period is both reasonable and operationally realistic.

The creation of specific intimate partner violence offences, including assault and harassment against an intimate partner, would help members and courts identify patterns of abuse more realistically and in real time.

Enhanced information sharing among police services is vital when offences cross jurisdictions. Tagging individuals to intimate partner violence-related offences would allow officers arriving on scene to assess risk and context even when the suspect is unknown locally. That said, this change would require care and clarity in defining relationships and determining when an offence meets the threshold of an intimate partner context, as this could place additional scrutiny on officers' decisions in the moment.

The bill also introduces a seven-day judicial risk assessment provision for high-risk offenders, allowing courts to remand individuals for psychiatric evaluation when there is reasonable concern for an intimate partner's safety. This is a constructive and preventative measure that would ensure that risk management decisions are informed by expert input. However, its success would hinge on the availability of forensic and mental health resources, particularly in rural or remote locations. Without adequate federal, provincial and territorial support, these responsibilities could place further strain on both police and local community resources. It is essential that new duties introduced by this bill be accompanied by the necessary resourcing so that protective measures do not become downloaded obligations to the police alone.

Lastly, the bill proposes automatically designating intimate partner homicides as first-degree murder. The NPF supports the intent of this provision. However, it's also important that this measure not inadvertently capture or penalize victims who may act defensively or under coercion. Protecting victims must remain central to the bill's application and intent.

Thank you for the opportunity to present. I look forward to any questions.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now we're going to move into our first round of questions.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for giving us their time and joining us today. I think some of them have been here before or appeared previously before other parliamentary committees, so we very much appreciate it.

Our work on Bill C-225 is nearing an end, and although it hasn't been passed, I'd be pretty surprised if the bill doesn't move forward.

Mr. Sauvé, clearly, you're in favour of the bill. I'm delighted that you're satisfied with a number of things it contains. However, you say that there aren't enough resources, that they have to be provided for. Otherwise, enforcing the bill could be a significant challenge.

Could you provide more clarity or be more specific about the needs that may not be addressed?

In fact, could you tell us what resources are needed to fill the gaps you've identified?

Brian Sauvé: Members of the RCMP work all over the country, not just in big cities. If we consider just Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary or Edmonton, for instance, communities there may have enough resources, including police or police liaison services, to achieve the goal. However, in places like Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories; Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador; or Grise Fiord, Nunavut, sometimes our members, accused and victims have to travel by plane to someplace central, such as Iqaluit or St. John's.

Police services in remote communities will need resources if the bill is to be successful. It's important to look beyond big cities, Laval or Montreal, for instance. Just because they may have the resources doesn't mean everything will be fine.

Dominique Vien: That will help with enforcing the law.

Brian Sauvé: Exactly. Putting all those resources in place requires federal-territorial-provincial partnership.

Dominique Vien: As parliamentarians, we've raised the possibility that this could inadvertently harm a victim acting defensively in a violent situation, meaning that they could be accused. You raised that too.

From all your experience, can you tell us roughly how many such problem cases might arise? I'm talking about cases where women—or men, because they too can be victims—are considered the accused, not the victim. Do you have a sense of what that figure might be?

Brian Sauvé: No, I don't have a figure. There are always “he said, she said” cases.

However, it's not really the job of police to make that initial determination. It's really the job of the courts.

Dominique Vien: Thank you.

Now I'm going to turn to Ms. Nadeau.

Good morning, Ms. Nadeau.

• (1115)

Sabrina Nadeau: Good morning.

Dominique Vien: Ms. Nadeau, you too talked about the fear that, in the commotion of a violent incident, the victim could find themselves wrongly accused. You said you wouldn't go that far. Did I understand you correctly? You said that we shouldn't go that far, but that we should focus instead on criminalizing and targeting coercive control. Is that what you said?

Sabrina Nadeau: Yes, exactly.

However, if it could be proved that a homicide or murder was committed in a context of coercive control, charges of first-degree murder could automatically be laid. I think that makes a lot of sense because, according to the science and the data on spousal homicides, they are really deliberate and planned acts. It is very rare for someone to wake up one morning and decide to kill their spouse by giving in to an impulse. We're not talking about this type of crime; we're really talking about crimes that are planned. It makes sense to me that it would be easier to lay a charge of first-degree murder and that it would be easier to show that there was intent and planning. So I think it could help the Crown, which has to prove these facts. That would lead to a better protection of victims.

Dominique Vien: You have worked for about 30 years with violent men. You said at the outset that this has been a revelation for you. What has that experience shown you?

Sabrina Nadeau: It has shown me that it was possible to change and that we had to seize every opportunity that arises in these people's service trajectory. I worked on the side of victims, as a Crown prosecutor. I saw the justice aspect of this issue. I wouldn't say that victims were mistreated, but it was often very difficult for them to navigate the legal system. The situation is improving, but it's still not perfect, far from it.

Personally, what I like about my work is that I work to protect victims by putting the hat on the right person—that is, by working to make men accountable. Some really profound changes and lifestyle changes can be made as a result of our interventions with these men. I have worked with board members who had received services and had adopted a completely non-violent lifestyle. So it is possible to change; we see that a lot.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry; that's the end of our time.

Now we're going to Ms. Nathan for six minutes.

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

To both of you, thank you for being here today to answer these questions to help us make more informed decisions.

My first question is directed to Mr. Sauv . It's an operational clarity question.

If Bill C-225's IPV-specific offences and Bill C-16's coercive control offences were both enacted, how would this affect frontline charging decisions? Would police require additional guidance to determine whether to lay a coercive control charge versus a standard IPV offence?

Brian Sauv : One of the concerns we're raising is to have clarity, whether it be within Bill C-16 or within Bill C-225. Our members are not experts in determining these things on the front line. They usually make operational decisions in the moment. To ensure that there's clarity within the charge approval process, the member who makes the arrest and processes that arrest does not face scrutiny about how they made that operational decision. You have to have the Crown and the court process to be able to review, modify, update, etc., should new information or evidence come to light.

Juanita Nathan: Are you saying that you need more information and more procedural guidance on this?

Brian Sauv : We need care and clarity, yes.

Juanita Nathan: I have a question about the first-degree murder framework.

From an evidentiary standpoint, would Bill C-16's requirements to demonstrate coercive control before classifying murder as first degree create a clearer persecutorial pathway than Bill C-225's automatic designation? Which mode is more workable operationally?

Brian Sauv : I can't answer that one, honestly. I'll have to get back to you, because I haven't looked into Bill C-16 and that particular avenue of it. My apologies.

Juanita Nathan: That's understood.

If we could get some clarity on that, that would be good.

In regard to system capacity, if Bill C-16 includes measures to reduce court delays while Bill introduces new offences and procedural requirements, from a policing perspective, would layering these regimes create added system strain, or do you see them as complementary?

• (1120)

Brian Sauv : If we're talking about one particular file, with additional charges, I don't see that as being a burden administratively in the court system because it's one court date after another after another with numerous charges and offences.

If we're talking about the creation of new court dates for different offences, then it probably becomes an administrative burden, but responsibility for funding and resource allocation is also a provincial and territorial matter.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you.

Bill C-16 expands victims' rights to information and testimonial supports. In your experience, are these procedural protections more impactful for victims' safety and co-operation than increasing maximum penalties as proposed in Bill C-225?

Brian Sauv : As for the sharing of information cross-jurisdictionally, we had this discussion when there was a study about section 810 of the Criminal Code and peace bonds. That is an important improvement that we need to focus on. Should a victim choose to move from one city to another, their information moves with them, but also information about the offender is made available to them.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you so much.

Ms. Nadeau, Bill C-225 would automatically classify all intimate partner murders as first degree whereas Bill C-16 limits automatic first-degree murder between intimate partners to circumstances involving coercive control. From a behavioural perspective, does tying first-degree classification to patterns of control better reflect how lethal IPV develops?

[Translation]

Sabrina Nadeau: I'll try to answer the question quickly.

Proving or having to prove all the behaviours or the [Technical difficulty—Editor] to homicide may make it possible to gather more circumstantial evidence or evidence that will come [Technical difficulty—Editor] victims, especially in cases of attempted murder, assault or harassment. The goal is really to be able to establish the context, since it's the context that is aggravating. We shouldn't limit ourselves to the partner, but we also have to protect the new partners, the children and all the people involved in the domestic and family violence context.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

The interpreters were having a little bit of difficulty. Ms. Nadeau, there is a background on your video. We thought this could be problematic. So far, we seem to be getting along, but that could be problematic in the future.

Now we go to Madame Larouche.

[Translation]

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

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

I would like to thank Ms. Nadeau for her commitment to this vital organization, À cœur d'homme, a support network for men for a violence-free society. I'll come back to her.

Mr. Sauv , since the beginning of the meeting, we've been talking a lot about the issue of first-degree murder. I still have a small question about this and I would like some clarification.

You said yourself, at the end of your opening remarks, that you support the intent of the bill, but that we have to be careful that it doesn't penalize victims. We are gathered here in a constructive spirit, to see what we can propose as improvements to the bill.

Is there anything that could be added to that intent to reduce the risks for victims?

• (1125)

[English]

Brian Sauv : I'm not a lawyer.

I think we need to be careful in this world, or in this space, because the world is smaller. Online harassment, online bullying and interpersonal relationships have definitely become more challenging over time. I think there is definitely a world where victims could be caught up in a self-defence situation where they might be facing challenges.

It's easy to say that they can go to court and prove their innocence using the defence of self-defence, but what about the interim? What about the timeline between that process and how their life is impacted publicly and on social media, etc.? From that perspective, I think we need to tread lightly and be careful.

As far as legislative amendments are concerned, I would turn it back to those who are experts in that field. I'll offer only that.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Nadeau, I'll now ask you the same question.

I'm trying to understand the nuances between what you said in your opening remarks and the answers you gave to my colleagues. If I can summarize, you are also in favour of the principle, for first-degree murder, but you also seem to have some reservations, especially when it comes to the impact on certain victims.

What do we do then? Do we maintain the idea of first-degree murder? Are we trying to change the proposal in the bill? Can safe-

guards be established to reassure victims and ensure that this can't be used against them?

Sabrina Nadeau: As Mr. Sauv  said earlier, I would leave that to the lawyers, who are legislation experts. However, I believe that the safeguards should make it possible to ensure that the context is properly presented, so that it is understood who was the perpetrator of the violence and who was the victim, and so that it can be more easily ensured that a person is not wrongly accused.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will continue with the second round of questions for—

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, I don't know if I'm mistaken, but according to my timer, I spoke for only 3 minutes and 56 seconds. I had six minutes in total, and I used barely four minutes.

[English]

The Chair: I would say that the clerk has been looking at it.

Okay, so you have one additional minute, then.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: According to my timer, I spoke for only four minutes, and I did start it at the beginning of my turn to speak. I don't know what happened, but I should have another two minutes of speaking time.

[English]

The Chair: I apologize. You do. We had a mistake here with the timer.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Okay. Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Sauv  or Ms. Nadeau.

Are you more in favour of increasing existing penalties, or do you think that creating a separate offence would have a bigger impact than increasing penalties would?

Brian Sauv : I'll go first and repeat what I said earlier.

[English]

The world has changed and I think we do need to look at how, in the online world today, intimate partner violence can be inanimate. It can be via social media and it can be character assassination through that type of thing.

How do we look at that, and are we able in the Criminal Code right now to deal with that?

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Nadeau, you said, among other things, that it wasn't necessary to increase the number of offences that already exist, but that monitoring should instead be improved. Do you have anything further to say on the issue of increased penalties?

Sabrina Nadeau: Yes, the science is really clear. That has no deterrent effect when it comes to offences being committed. The most important thing is really to ensure that there is monitoring and an offer of services on a number of levels. We must seize the opportunity whenever we have a chance to intervene with these people, both the victims, to protect them, and the perpetrators of violence.

• (1130)

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Mr. Sauvé, you talked about the lack of resources in rural areas. In 15 seconds, can you give me a starting point? I'll come back to that in my second round.

Brian Sauvé: I don't think it's a matter of a lack of resources. We simply have to make sure that, if the bill is passed as is, we have enough resources and that we have a partnership between the federal government and the provinces and territories to put all this in place.

[English]

The Chair: Now we really will go to Ms. Roberts for the second round of five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Sauvé, for your service. It's important to us all here today.

As we all know, intimate partner violence has increased by 76%. That is a known fact. We also know that eight in 10 women and girls are not the cause, but they suffer in these situations.

My question is very simple. In your consideration, will Bill C-225 strengthen the law to protect women so that they do not have to face the consequences?

Brian Sauvé: Will it become a deterrent? Possibly.

Will it strengthen some of the provisions for bail and consideration on distinct offences? I think it could, yes.

Anna Roberts: We know that this catch-and-release situation has burdened a lot of women. A lot of women are scared. They're afraid to testify. We've heard from several witnesses that they fear for their lives and their family's lives.

How can we strengthen this bill to ensure that we protect them?

Brian Sauvé: I think we need to have an environment where someone feels safe in providing evidence against someone who may have assaulted them.

Anna Roberts: We talk about this catch-and-release. Who examines these individuals to ensure that they won't reoffend? Do we need to incorporate someone from the health profession? If it's a second offence, do they spend more time in jail?

How do we change the system to ensure that this individual, once arrested, doesn't go out and commit another crime?

Brian Sauvé: You've heard us talk a lot about different things. To Madame Nadeau's point, both can be true.

Do we do enough for those who have been convicted to correct behaviour, rehabilitate them and make them productive members of

society? Keep in mind that our legal system in Canada is based on the principle of rehabilitation, not incarceration.

Do we do enough provincially, territorially and federally to ensure that time spent for a conviction, whether it be in the community or behind bars, is actually supporting that convicted person to change their ways?

Anna Roberts: With Bailey's law.... We know the situation escalated and obviously she suffered the worst consequences that any one of us here could imagine.

How was it that this individual was released? Was he examined? Had he been examined—for anger management or whatever the situation was—would that have helped the police make a decision to keep him in jail? Obviously, he was a risk to society and that was proven.

How do we ensure that this individual is assessed properly, so that he doesn't reoffend?

My concern is that we have victims and we also have survivors. I've spoken to many survivors who are afraid for their lives because they know that the individual will be released on bail.

• (1135)

Brian Sauvé: Just so we're clear, in that particular case, it was not a police decision for release. We're talking about the court decision for release and whether the conditions imposed by the court were sufficient if not. The police respond from a reactionary perspective to a breach.

Did the courts have enough? Was there enough from the Crown counsel to justify detention? I think those are all bigger discussions to have.

Would it have made an impact in this particular case? We're hypothesizing now. I don't know.

Anna Roberts: You mentioned more training and more education for police officers. I had the opportunity to spend some time with undercover operations last week. I have to tell you, the individuals and the police officers that I dealt with were very professional.

My question to them was the following: How do we ensure that we protect survivors of these crimes?

The Chair: That's an excellent question, but you're out of time, so we'll catch it on the next round.

We'll go now to Ms. Fancy for five minutes.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you to both witnesses for being here today.

Thank you to Mr. Caputo for this bill.

With regard to some of the questions surrounding coercive control, I'd like to start today with Ms. Nadeau before I go on to Mr. Sauvé, if I have time.

Ms. Nadeau, thank you so much for being here today with your legal expertise and for being an advocate for women.

We know that in relationships, coercive control and intimate partner violence often precede more serious violence including homicide, which is a topic we've talked about a lot today. Parliament is recommending criminalizing coercive control. That recommendation has been reflected in Bill C-16, which has been proposed by our government.

From your perspective, though, how important is it to criminalize these controlling behaviours to prevent worse outcomes for victims?

[Translation]

Sabrina Nadeau: Currently, the entire dynamic of domestic violence, and thus coercive control, remains hidden in the intimate sphere and within couples. For people to recognize that these acts are illegal and unacceptable, they must be exposed.

Establishing coercive control as an offence would ensure that everyone would be informed that these acts [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. That's a very important lever for us. When we work with men [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], we tell them that what they're doing is unacceptable, but that has to be reflected in social policies and in the legislation.

That's where I think it could have a very [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] effect.

[English]

Jessica Fancy: Thank you very much for that.

There were some dead spots within the connection there, so I hope our analysts got all of that wealth of information.

I have a second question in terms of bail.

Bill C-225 would remove police discretion to release an accused in certain IPV cases. From the National Police Federation's perspective—and the same question is for you, Mr. Sauvé—how would you say this affects frontline policing? Do you feel it would lead to more bail hearings in our provincial court system?

The Chair: That was for Mr. Sauvé, right?

Jessica Fancy: That was for Ms. Nadeau and Mr. Sauvé. Sorry, I thought I was clear with that.

We're asking Ms. Nadeau. There is a part in Bill C-225 where it would remove police discretion to release an accused in certain IPV cases.

How do you find this would affect frontline policing? Would it lead to more bail hearings in provincial courts than prosecutors could realistically handle?

[Translation]

Sabrina Nadeau: That could lead to an additional burden. However, it's essential, to the extent that the court is able to do so—in any case, in Quebec, it's possible—to ask for clarification. Therefore, the court can ask a probation officer or a [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] before releasing them. However, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the perpetrator of domestic violence has to agree—

• (1140)

[English]

The Chair: One minute, please, we're going to suspend.

• (1140)

(Pause)

• (1140)

The Chair: All right, we're back.

Jessica Fancy: In the minute and a half I have left, I'd love to ask Mr. Sauvé the same question in regard to how he feels this will affect frontline policing.

Brian Sauvé: In the broad context, police officers appreciate the ability to not automatically release and allow the courts to make the decision as to whether or not release is warranted. It will have a downstream impact. Do we have enough probation officers? Do we have enough judges? Do we have enough Crown prosecutors? Do we have enough court spaces? Definitely, but it's not a police problem, sorry.

The Chair: All right, that's your time.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will try to put my questions to both witnesses in the time I have.

Mr. Sauvé, I said I would come back to the issue of resources. In your opening remarks, you said that things were going well for big cities, but that there could be problems in rural areas. That was my understanding.

In response to my previous question, you told me that you had the resources. I'll ask my question in a different way.

Given the resources available to police forces in Quebec and Canada, is it realistic to add to them the duties set out in Bill C-225? Would they be able to implement the provisions of the bill quickly? You can make the distinction between urban and rural areas.

Brian Sauvé: Today, they would not be able to do that.

Andréanne Larouche: I asked you whether the provisions of the bill could be applied quickly, and you said no. Did I understand correctly?

Brian Sauvé: That's correct.

Andréanne Larouche: The reality is that legislation is passed here, but, as you said, it's sort of up to the provinces and territories to enforce it, hence the funding issue. This will be my last question, and you will have to answer it quickly. Therefore, the legislation should include funding transfers to increase resources. After the federal government passes legislation, the money would have to come to the provinces and territories so that they can enforce it. Is that correct?

Brian Sauv : Yes. The federal government could transfer money to the provinces and territories.

Right now, we see that, in all provincial and territorial budgets, particularly in the British Columbia and Nova Scotia budgets, which were released yesterday, funding for public safety and justice has been cut. It seems rather difficult to apply the provisions of the bill under such conditions.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Ms. Nadeau, still on this idea of resources, you talked about supporting organizations on the ground. What would that require?

Sabrina Nadeau: Of course, money is required. That said, we also need pilot projects to encourage initiatives that are currently working on the ground. We can also draw inspiration from things that work, such as rapid response units, which enable everyone involved to work together and raise the red flag when there is a risk of homicide.

In addition, we have pilot projects that enable suspects to be in a rehabilitation house—that is, to live in a house under supervision—with resources available 24/7 and an obligation to undergo therapy in one of our resources.

Lastly, collaboration on the ground between police forces and our organizations enables us to call the suspect after the police intervention to recommend services. That has been working very well for two years now.

• (1145)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will go to Mr. Caputo for five minutes.

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses, Madame Nadeau and Monsieur Sauv . I appreciate this. I am the drafter of this bill, so I obviously have a great deal of interest in how things play out at this committee.

I will say one thing at the beginning.

We're here to talk about Bill C-225. The last time we had victims here whose loved ones were killed by virtue of intimate partner violence, there were questions about Bill C-16 put forward. I know that will also happen today. I get how politics work. I get how things work at committees. However, we have to retain the focus on Bill C-225, period. In my view, this is not the time or place to attempt to leverage another bill like Bill C-16 when we have a very important matter before us, Bill C-225. Particularly last time, when we had victims and witnesses here with respect to Bill C-225.... I

invite this committee to stick to Bill C-225. The place to discuss Bill C-16 is here in this room, but not at present.

With that, I will discuss Bill C-225.

Mr. Sauv , one thing I consulted some peace officers on was something you just mentioned. It was the notion of holding somebody for bail.

For those who aren't aware, a police officer generally has discretion regarding whether they release somebody at the scene or hold them for court. By "hold them for court", I mean hold them for a bail hearing, in which case the judge does that. Now, the current law as it stands is this: A person must be released on the least onerous conditions at the earliest possibility. I don't think there's any dispute with the law on that. The reason I incorporated this into the bill is to essentially work around the current law, because intimate partner violence is different in that it has the highest victim pool, frankly, when it comes to homicide, ongoing violence and the cycle of violence.

Can you comment on whether this discretion is something that...? When I say, "this discretion", I mean whether the courts being required to do this adds a measure of seriousness to the release order, as opposed to an officer releasing at the scene.

Brian Sauv : Well, for sure, as I mentioned in response to the previous question, our members would appreciate clarity in taking that decision-making or that discretion away from them, meaning if we're talking about an intimate partner violence offence, whether it's one of the new ones that's proposed or whether it's an existing domestic assault offence, then you're going to court. Great, let's put together the package. There's clarity from the perspective of the accused, and there's clarity from the perspective of the police.

Frank Caputo: Thank you. That was a very comprehensive answer.

Madame Nadeau, do you have anything to add on that?

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Sabrina Nadeau: I'm very pleased that you've added to the bill the requirement to have an assessment by the court. I think that, in cases of repeat offences or breaches of probation, a judge should rule on the person's dangerousness and be able to impose conditions.

[*English*]

Frank Caputo: Thank you both for your comments.

I'll just add, in regard to what you said, that intimate partner violence cases are so different in that somebody might never have been before the court and yet still be a substantial threat to their intimate partner that we don't see with respect to other offences.

Thank you.

The Chair: Now we will go to Madame Ménard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ménard, go ahead for five minutes.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard (Hochelaga—Rosemont-Est, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Sauv . Your return to the committee is already very enlightening.

Thank you, as well, Ms. Nadeau.

In this committee, we are very focused on support for victims and survivors. It's a committee where, year after year, the members are working very well together, in a collaborative and constructive spirit. I think it is responsible, important and healthy to compare the various proposals, not to invalidate anything, but rather to ensure that, at the end of the day, victims are honoured and survivors are supported.

Ms. Nadeau, in your opening remarks, you warned the committee about the possibility of increasing the number of offences. Bill C-16, as drafted by the Minister of Justice, proposes to criminalize coercive control. So that, in and of itself, is a separate offence.

Do you see this as superfluous addition, or do you see it as a real added value?

Sabrina Nadeau: I see it as a real value added. That's exactly what is needed. I think that would be the solution, since these behaviours are not currently being exposed. We already have assault and violence. Everyone knows that physical violence, bullying and harassment are criminal acts, but, in my opinion, all the strategies surrounding that, which may seem trivial in a context that is not a context of domestic violence, must be exposed.

Marie-Gabrielle M nard: Obviously, there are two main situations. One is what can be done to support families once their loved ones are gone forever. I am sending as much courage as possible to the McCourt family. What they will have to go through is horrible. There are no words strong enough to support them. The other one is prevention, which I would like us to talk about. In particular, there are femicides that have not yet been committed. As a society, we still have time to act.

Ms. Nadeau, you talk about prevention. You have 30 years of experience on the ground. You seem to be saying that not only is behavioural change possible, but it can even be permanent. Things are never completely permanent, but that's still important. Can you expand a little bit on what you mean by that? If I understood correctly, this should be part of a preventive approach, which must be financially supported.

Sabrina Nadeau: Since the "Reb tir la confiance" report was written in Quebec, it has really been recognized that we must deal with perpetrators of violence and intervene with them.

In terms of homicide prevention, our organization worked with researchers—more than 12 years ago—to develop the first tool that detected the risk of homicide in the discourse of perpetrators of violence. Often, the risk is detected because the victim talks and says she's in danger, but we really work on the side of the perpetrator.

We wonder how we can determine whether that person is dangerous.

We've also trained the probation officers who work with this clientele. A lot of training has been provided, and it was always related to victim protection, which is absolutely necessary. However, when it comes to monitoring perpetrators of violence, if we want to seal the service trajectory and ensure that monitoring of perpetrators in the courts is done in a consistent and safe manner, people need to be trained to intervene with this clientele.

Marie-Gabrielle M nard: Very briefly, do you think the government has played a role in funding prevention measures?

Sabrina Nadeau: Yes. The Status of Women Secretariat did that as part of COVID-19 funding. The funding has been very helpful in making sure that we have the right players on the ground.

• (1155)

Marie-Gabrielle M nard: Thank you, Ms. Nadeau.

Mr. Sauv , as you said, the world is changing and it is often more complex than it seems. Are tougher laws the only way to prevent femicides?

Brian Sauv : Yes and no.

[*English*]

Everything needs to work hand in hand. I know there are discussions about digital lawful access. I know there are discussions going on about bail reform. There are discussions about changing different offences. All of those things—especially once we get to digital lawful access, online harassment and all of that great stuff—should prove fruitful. Really, they should be working hand in hand versus in silos.

The Chair: Excellent.

That is the end of our first panel. I want to thank our witnesses. If there are comments you'd like to provide to the clerk that you didn't get a chance to say in your testimony, we'd love to receive them. Thank you so much for being with us today.

I'll briefly suspend so we can switch to our next panel.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: Welcome back. We are in our second panel talking about Bill C-225.

I want to welcome the witnesses here for the second hour. We have, from the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, Raneem Yaseen.

[*Translation*]

Next, from the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, we have Karine Barrette, lawyer and project manager, and Louise Riendeau, co-lead, political affairs.

Welcome.

We will begin with opening remarks.

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

[*English*]

Raneem Yaseen (Project Lawyer, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic): Thank you, Madam Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Raneem Yaseen. I am the project lawyer for the criminalization and survivorship project at the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. I'm appearing on behalf of the executive director of the clinic.

The clinic has supported women and gender-diverse survivors of violence for over 40 years through trauma- and violence-informed legal services and advocacy. We can't support Bill C-225, as currently drafted, not because of its intent, but because of how its language will operate in practice.

I want to briefly ground our concerns in our data and legal experience. Between September 2022 and September 2025, our criminalization of women project recorded over 1,200 admissions and service files. These are survivors of gender-based violence who are charged with criminal offences in the context of abuse. This volume tells us that survivor criminalization is systemic, not exceptional. Our clients face intersecting barriers.

We've supported survivors across Toronto and multiple districts, including rural and northern areas. Services were provided in over 25 languages, which directly affects whether survivors can understand conditions, comply with court orders and safely navigate the criminal justice system.

We also see how violence creates instability. A number of our files were discharged, because the client could not be contacted. This can often be due to housing precarity, fear, surveillance by an abusive partner or crisis.

Through our court observation project, more than half of the observed criminal matters involved intimate partner violence, and we repeatedly saw peace bonds applied without regard to differing levels of severity, breaches treated as technical non-compliance rather than ongoing coercive control, and language that minimized survivors' lived realities.

This is the system that Bill C-225 will function within, and the bill expands criminalization through new IPV-specific offences with higher penalties, mandatory detention rules, expanded custody for risk assessment and automatic legal classifications. Our concern is straightforward. The bill assumes that the problem is a lack of criminal tools. Our data shows that the problem is how existing tools are applied without context.

In our legal practice, survivors are routinely misidentified as primary aggressors, dual-charged or drawn into repeated court contact

through breaches that function as coercive control and litigation abuse.

Expanding offences and penalties without explicit survivor-centred interpretation will widen the net. It will increase the number of survivors—particularly racialized, indigenous, migrant and low-income survivors—and expose them to more serious charges, detention and prolonged system involvement. Automatic detention and custody provisions further remove discretion and context. They don't distinguish between patterns of domination and acts of survival. From our practice, that distinction is critical to safety and justice.

The clinic is asking the committee to amend Bill C-225 in three targeted ways.

The first is to add explicit survivor-centric interpretive language. The bill should require that intimate partner violence be assessed in context, including coercive control, power, imbalance, fear and survival strategies.

The second is to build in safeguards against misidentification and dual-charging. Expanded criminalization without guardrails will predictably increase survivor criminalization. Criminal justice actors must be required to actively consider misidentification before charges, detention or escalated conditions.

The third is to limit mandatory detention and custody powers. Automatic rules should be replaced with contextual risk-based assessments that explicitly consider survivor safety and the risk of increased harm through continued court contact. These aren't radical changes; they're necessary safeguards.

The clinic supports serious action on intimate partner violence, but the Criminal Code is a powerful instrument, and language matters. From our data and our legal work, we know that without explicit survivor-centred safeguards, reforms intended to protect can instead punish.

We urge the committee to amend Bill C-225 so that it addresses violence without increasing the criminalization of survivors.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

Also appearing with us today, from the National Family and Survivors Circle, is Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, the president.

I invite you to make your remarks for five minutes.

Hilda Anderson-Pyrz (President, National Family and Survivors Circle Inc.): Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I come before you as a witness to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and as the president of the National Family and Survivors Circle Inc.

The national inquiry's final report is grounded in truths, shared by more than 2,380 family members, survivors, experts and knowledge-keepers. It issued 231 calls for justice. These calls for justice are legal imperatives directed at governments, institutions and industries to end systemic conditions that continue to place indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people at heightened risk of violence.

Today, as you study Bill C-225, which seeks to strengthen Criminal Code responses to intimate partner violence, I urge the committee to ensure that any legislative reform aligns with the 231 calls for justice and meaningfully improves safety for indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

I have some recommendations. Number one is to require an indigenous-specific safety and impact review. Before advancing Bill C-225, conduct a distinctions-based and gender-based analysis examining how the proposed amendments may impact indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, including potential unintended consequences such as over-policing or barriers to reporting violence.

Number two is to pair Criminal Code reform and prevention investments. Legislative reform must be accompanied by guaranteed funding for prevention measures, including safe housing, culturally grounded healing programs, legal supports and community-led safety initiatives. Without these measures, legal reform alone will not prevent violence.

Number three is to ensure trauma-informed and culturally safe risk assessments. If Bill C-225 introduces risk assessment tools, they must include mandatory trauma-informed and culturally safe training standards to prevent bias and ensure victim safety is prioritized.

Number four is to address safety and resource development contexts. The calls for justice 13.1 to 13.5 highlight the responsibility of extractive and development industries to prevent violence in resource regions. Intimate partner violence reforms must be connected to prevention efforts in high-risk regions and accompanied by adequate community infrastructure supports.

Number five is to establish measurable accountability in reporting to Parliament. The committee should recommend transparent reporting mechanisms to track whether Bill C-225 reduces violence and improves outcomes for indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. This aligns with calls for justice 1.7 and 1.10, which emphasize independent oversight and annual reporting to Parliament.

If Bill C-225 is to have meaningful impact, it must do more than amend the Criminal Code. It must be paired with prevention, culturally safe implementation and enforced accountability. The safety

and dignity of indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are not abstract policy issues. They are matters of human rights, justice and survival. I urge this committee to ensure that any legislative action taken strengthens protection in real, measurable and structural ways.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Ekosi.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

We will now hear from Karine Barrette and Louise Riendeau, from the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Louise Riendeau (Co-Lead, Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Good morning.

We thank the committee for inviting us to present our views on Bill C-225.

The Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale applauds the desire to increase sentences for domestic violence offences by creating specific offences and increasing the applicable sentences. The justice system must send a clear message that not only does our society condemn this violence, it is also cracking down on it. We do nonetheless have concerns with the approach being proposed here.

Bill C-225 maintains the approach of laying charges for isolated incidents, whereas domestic violence involves a series of behaviours characterized by control and violence. We clearly prefer the approach taken in Bill C-16, which creates the offence of coercive or controlling conduct against an intimate partner and would treat femicide by an intimate partner as first-degree murder in the presence of a pattern of coercive or controlling conduct.

Bill C-16 therefore seeks to criminalize a pattern of coercive and controlling conduct involving any combination or repetition of the following acts: using, attempting to use or threatening to use violence against an intimate partner; coercing or attempting to coerce the intimate partner to engage in sexual activity; or any other behaviour, including monitoring the intimate partner, controlling how they care for a child, controlling any matter relating to their employment or education, economic control, controlling their physical appearance, clothing, food or care, controlling their opinions, beliefs or culture, as well as threats of suicide or self-harm.

Bill C-16 therefore includes all offences covered in clauses 1 to 6 of Bill C-225. Considering these offences in isolation without considering whether there is a pattern of coercive or controlling conduct can lead to injustices, particularly toward victims.

Three types of people could be charged under Bill C-225: a controlling spouse who used violence to maintain their domination and terrorize their intimate partner; a spouse who, in an isolated situation, used violence against their intimate partner; a spouse who was a victim of violence who used violence to defend herself during an intimate partner assault. In all three cases, a person could be charged with assaulting an intimate partner or causing bodily harm to an intimate partner, or even murder, when the actual situation is very different.

We still regularly see women who have caused injuries or marks on the body of their abusive partner as he tried to strangle them without leaving a mark on the victim's neck or face. Often, the woman doesn't remember what happened because she fainted. Unfortunately, these women are not always well defended. Too often, their lawyer encourages them to plead guilty, despite all the consequences that a criminal record can have. Under Bill C-225, they could receive a longer sentence. We maintain that an approach that considers the history of violence and the presence of various kinds of control will provide more justice for victims.

We were interested, though, in clauses 8 and 9 of Bill C-225. In Quebec, we have various programs to enhance the safety of victims of domestic violence. These are as follows: the assessment of offenders at the interim release stage, the use of an electronic bracelet, the follow-up service for accused persons and the residential housing program. However, none of these programs can be used if the offender is not detained in custody. Unfortunately, because of the principle of restraint prescribed by the Supreme Court and enshrined in the Criminal Code, many police officers feel obliged to release violent spouses, even if they are repeat offenders or offenders under a release order in connection with an offence committed against an intimate partner.

We therefore support clause 8 which prevents a peace officer from releasing offenders in these two situations. In requiring them to appear before the court, the court system will be able to assess the possibility of using one of those programs, or even keeping the offenders in custody.

In terms of assessing offenders for domestic violence, one of the limitations of the Quebec program is that it's voluntary and lawyers advise their clients not to participate. We think what is proposed in clause 9 of the bill is promising.

Thank you.

• (1215)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will start our first round of questions with Madame Vien.

You have six minutes.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies, thank you for being here. We see your faces once in a while. We often see you in the public space, and every time we invite you, you show up. We know how busy your schedules are.

This is not an easy situation. We don't manage easy situations at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. It seems that the bill before us is similar to any other bill in that we can strengthen and improve it by making amendments. I think we're all working constructively. In fact, the sponsor of the bill is with us today and will have the opportunity to speak to you. That said, that's why you're here, to get us thinking about various aspects and contexts.

I can say that, on the whole, Bill C-225 has been quite positively received in a number of settings, including in the justice system and the police. I understand that you may have different points of view, reservations, fears or warnings to make in various respects, and you are in the right place and in front of the right people to do so.

I'd like to point out that, in Quebec, unless things have changed, our data shows that there have already been six femicides this year. This is devastating, and the year has barely started. It is all very worrisome. A woman is murdered every two days in Canada. When I learned that, it sent chills down my spine. I never thought we would see those numbers in Canada. According to the Government of Canada's website, 240 women were murdered in 2024. This bill is not perfect, but we think it can be a step in the right direction. That's what Mr. Sauvé, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, said earlier.

Let me begin with you, Ms. Yaseen. You are obviously quite critical of Bill C-225. You said a lot of things in a short time earlier; I wrote down as much information as possible. You said that, between 2022 and 2025, a lot of women who found themselves in problematic or violent situations were criminalized. You warned us to be careful about what could go wrong under Bill C-225.

Did I understand your point of view correctly? If so, please elaborate on the safeguards against misidentification that you also mentioned at the outset.

• (1220)

[English]

Raneem Yaseen: I do want to take the opportunity to clarify.

Our criminalization of women project looks at criminalized survivors. These are survivors of domestic violence and abuse who are actually criminalized and face a charge. They are coming to us for summary legal advice.

The concerning trend that we're seeing is that the project sees approximately five new clients a week. This is very troubling for us, because that means there are survivors being criminalized that frequently. This is likely due to mandatory charging policies that require police to lay charges in domestic violence cases where the officer believes there are reasonable grounds.

In theory, that was a protective piece of policy. However, what we've seen in practice is that it harms survivors. It's actually been used to criminalize them and misidentify them as primary aggressors, which is how they end up in our clinic as clients.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: We're talking about the possibility of treating the murder of an intimate partner as first-degree murder. Are you afraid that there will be problems identifying a woman or even a man as the person responsible? As I said, men also are victims, but in the vast majority of cases, the victims are women. Are you concerned that things could go sideways in this regard?

[English]

Raneem Yaseen: The first concern is that the classification, on its face, would remove nuance. For example, it would fail to take into account a long-term history of abuse or cases involving survivors who kill their abusers.

Requiring the courts to consider coercive control, history of abuse and all that—at a stage to create some sort of explicit exemption—is something the clinic would consider in order to safeguard against this.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Thank you very much, Ms. Yaseen.

Ms. Riendeau, thank you for being here. It seems that you're walking on eggshells regarding Bill C-225. You've talked about Bill C-16, but we would rather talk about Bill C-225, above all, because we have not spent much time on it.

This morning, Brian Sauvé, president of the National Police Federation, said it was a step in the right direction. Everything can be improved, of course, but you're not throwing out the baby with the bathwater when it comes to Bill C-225, are you?

Louise Riendeau: In fact, we think amendments should be made to reflect what domestic violence really is and to make sure—to prevent any mistakes, as our colleague said—that we can determine whether one of the offences in question was committed in a context of coercive control. That is pretty much what we find in Bill C-16. We could therefore import the clauses of that bill that reflect the

presence of coercive control in the murder of an intimate partner. That would ensure that victims who are unfortunately being charged right now, in cross-complaints—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. I think this is the worst part of this job.

We're going, now, to Ms. Khalid for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'll start with Ms. Anderson-Pyrz.

Thank you so much for being here, and thank you for your service to the community.

When you appeared at FEWO in November 2025, you said the following about Bill C-225 and the provision to make it automatic first-degree murder for IPV cases:

I think it could be dangerous, especially if a woman is protecting herself during intimate partner violence. As indigenous women, we know that we experience a lot of injustice in the justice system. Often, when we're expressing our lived experiences and our realities, we're ignored. We're dismissed.

How might the new intimate partner violence-specific offences disproportionately impact indigenous and 2SLGBT communities and survivors acting in self-defence?

• (1225)

Hilda Anderson-Pyrz: Again, look at the systemic and structural racism that's deeply embedded in the justice system, and at how police respond to intimate partner violence—or violence in general—against indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people. There are some risk factors in relation to how they respond and document what has occurred. I've been in this field for a long time, on the front line. There have been a lot of problems in relation to how police treat indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people when they've experienced violence and are reporting a crime that occurred against them.

I think it's critical that we put some mitigation strategies in this bill to address these risk factors in order to ensure the dignity of indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people, and that justice is equitable and upholds their inherent and human rights in the process.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you for that.

Based on the concerns you outlined, are there any amendments you would propose for Bill C-225 in its current form? If it's yes, can you please share them with us? If it's no, would you advise the committee to vote against this specific section of Bill C-225?

Hilda Anderson-Pyrz: I have to be brutally honest as an indigenous woman presenting here today. We're often not given adequate resources to do a comprehensive review of proposed legislation. I'm participating because I feel it's very important that our voices be included in this process. Given that, and given that I'm coming here with my lived experience and knowledge, having briefly reviewed the bill and presenting in the context as I understand it—without having legal representation here—it's kind of difficult to give a fulsome answer to your question.

I would say that any proposed legislation that can ensure that we're protected as indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people—understanding the environments we're coming from and taking that into consideration in relation to the 231 calls for justice—is welcome. However, it has to be done in a way that truly includes us and supports our lived realities.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much for that.

My second question is for Ms. Barrette.

Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale has criticized the new five IPV-specific offences in Bill C-225, saying that a victim who bites or scratches an attacker while being strangled could be charged just like a controlling and violent spouse. Simply adding the words “between intimate partners” to existing offences risks criminalizing self-defence instead of addressing patterns of control. What we need is an offence focused on coercive control, not relabelling of existing crimes.

Could you please expand on that and share your concerns with us?

[*Translation*]

Karine Barrette (Lawyer and Project Manager, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Yes, and Ms. Riendeau can add to that if she'd like.

What we often see on the ground, as other witnesses have also said, is that the primary aggressor is sometimes not properly analyzed, unfortunately. In the case of strangulation, in particular, it is possible that defensive injuries could be caused by the woman. At the time of the initial police intervention, those injuries will be on the primary aggressor. The victim may sometimes have fewer visible injuries. At that point, the victim will sometimes be arrested as well. Depending on the control mechanisms, some victims may be arrested or even charged with certain acts. If you don't consider the pattern of behaviour at play and instead look solely at an isolated incident, by asking what happened in February, for example, without considering all the dynamics and history of the relationship and what happened before, you can lose sight of the victim's defensive reaction.

Looking at the current wording of Bill C-235, we think it should at least be amended to add patterns of coercive or controlling conduct, as my colleague Ms. Riendeau said. We should also look at the intent behind that and draw a parallel with the intent of Bill C-16.

Echoing the witnesses who said that the law itself isn't enough, I would add that training for police and prosecutors is really critical for them to understand which factors determine who is the primary aggressor in a situation, since we know that the victim may have struck the first blow, that the primary aggressor can also call the police first and that the cross-complaint strategy can be used as a coercive control strategy by a lot of aggressors. Unfortunately, some even get advice from their lawyer to file a complaint against the victim.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Anderson-Pyrz. It's always a pleasure to see you here. Or course, that goes for Ms. Yaseen as well.

My first questions are for Ms. Riendeau and Ms. Barrette.

I don't know what my colleagues think, but to my mind there has been a recurring theme since the beginning of the year: Women who call my office to talk to me about domestic violence situations don't talk about a positive experience in the justice system. Rather, they tell me that the system has backfired on them, that they are the ones who are charged and that their abuser is in a much more favourable situation.

I want to pick up on a question raised at the end of Mrs. Vien's remarks. It was for you, Ms. Riendeau, but Ms. Barrette has just touched on it. So you can both answer. You were cut off when you were going to explain the cross-complaint strategy. I just want you to explain this to us clearly because I think it's central to a lot of what witnesses are saying right now about Bill C-225.

Please go ahead, Ms. Riendeau.

Louise Riendeau: Domestic violence, or coercive control, which we're talking about now, is a strategy that takes all kinds of forms and that an abuser uses to establish and maintain control over their partner. Using the justice system is one of the strategies, whether it's filing a criminal complaint against a partner or reporting her to youth protection services for the way she is raising the children.

Yes, we have to consider that and the fact that police officers don't always identify the primary aggressor, as my colleague said. In addition, advocates who should help women navigate the legal system are not always well equipped to do everything possible to defend those who have been victims of domestic violence.

That's why we have to make sure that the legislation requires the system to consider those elements before making a decision. Of course, we want controlling spouses to be punished more. They are the ones targeted by Bill C-225, but we have to be careful not to create collateral victims.

Andréanne Larouche: I'm going to continue with you quickly, Ms. Barrette, because you were talking about the significant impact of training. What boggles my mind right now is that there still seems to be far too much prejudice against victims. I also sense there are gaps in training, knowledge and tools, and that a lot of bias persists. Someone even talked to me about the thorny issue of the perfect victim. We will have to come back to the importance of including tools in the Criminal Code, as well as providing adequate training for people in the system.

Karine Barrette: In Quebec, as part of a specific project on improving judicial practice, the Regroupement will have trained more than 13,000 justice system professionals. We're really talking about the entire system here, meaning patrol officers, investigators, prosecutors, probation officers, correctional services employees and various types of immigration or family law lawyers.

There are indeed preconceived notions about the perfect victim. We hear them. That said, I think the goal right now is really to highlight the more invisible strategies. Coercive control is still not well understood. We're seeing progress in Quebec. There seems to be a lot of police mobilization. More than 5,500 police officers have been made aware of this issue.

In addition, I would say that, in terms of learning, there is a lot of willingness and openness to improving. The purpose of learning is really to enable people to recognize and detect strategies that are sometimes more insidious and not reported as often by victims. How do we demonstrate the existence of those strategies? How can they be highlighted? How can they be used to justify detention? That is precisely what clause 8 of Bill C-225 seeks to do.

Is bias being completely removed? No. Unfortunately, we still hear about it. Having worked with police organizations for a number of years, I can tell you however that this original, more limited view of violence, which was physical only or was based on isolated incidents, was very harmful. We really need to teach stakeholders to recognize the impact of ongoing coercive control. A prosecutor once said that domestic violence is not a photo, it's a movie. We are trying to educate and raise awareness among professionals in the justice system so they recognize that movie. That will enable them, in the case of bills such as Bill C-225, to make a distinction between reactive violence, for example, and a pattern of coercive control.

• (1235)

Andréanne Larouche: Domestic violence isn't a photo, but a movie. That really sums up the situation very well. I'll remember that.

Ms. Riendeau, in your opening remarks, you also mentioned risk assessment. Why is it necessary to detain an accused for assessment?

Louise Riendeau: In our system in Quebec, the prosecutor can request a risk assessment from the time of the bail hearing. If the spouse is released by police and is summoned to appear, that assessment will never happen. So we're saying that this will give us another chance, especially in the case of repeat offenders or spouses who were on conditional release and had been released on parole in connection with domestic violence. These people show us that they are not ready to respect the limits imposed on them by either the victim or the justice system. Those people are intrinsically more dangerous. That's why it's important to conduct an evaluation. That is also when we can make a distinction between someone who used violence in a specific situation and someone for whom it is a way of operating with their partner.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Now we go to the second round.

We have Frank Caputo for five minutes.

[Translation]

Frank Caputo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

[Translation]

I'm a lawyer and my wife is also a lawyer.

[English]

My wife runs four legal clinics, so I hope that is helpful to the witnesses. She deals largely with women and with people who don't qualify for legal aid.

I am also the author of this bill and a former Crown prosecutor. I taught sentencing class and advanced criminal law. These are areas in which I would like to think that I have a bit of experience.

I want to couch my comments by saying that I'm not attempting to be adversarial, but I would like to make this bill better. I want to point out one thing that I don't think I would like to engage in dialogue on. The notion of further criminalizing people is not the intent of the bill. I understand that nobody is saying that. The issue is that it would be a by-product of the bill.

This bill, believe it or not, is not about criminalizing. It is taking existing conduct that would otherwise be criminal and is addressing it either by renaming the offence or by altering the sentencing. In having an offence of assault of an intimate partner, we are not saying that we want more victims to become the accused. The reality is that, if somebody is guilty of assault of an intimate partner, they are also guilty of the offence of assault under the Criminal Code. I would hate to see a victim convicted of assault in those circumstances.

Similarly, if somebody is guilty of murder—and we say that it would be first-degree murder—that victim, today, would be guilty of at least second-degree murder. There is nothing in this bill that changes whether somebody is guilty of murder. It's an issue of sentencing and an issue of whether it would be first-degree or second-degree murder.

I don't want to see a victim be found guilty of second-degree murder. I'm talking about, for instance, the Lavallee decision, which I'm sure you're all familiar with, and the cases that have come after it. That's the last thing I would want. I don't think any victim should be guilty of murder. When I drafted this bill, I did so quite carefully in that regard.

I think we have to deal with the systemic issue. If the issue is one of criminalization of people who shouldn't be criminalized, then we need to deal with that, clearly. You are telling us that is an issue. Similarly, we don't want to see other people who are not guilty of these sorts of offences be found guilty. This is a huge issue.

I came from a jurisdiction where charge approval was not in the hands of police; it was in the prosecutorial hands, which is something I advocate for because I'm against mandatory charging for the issues you have laid out.

I know I just gave a very long preamble, but this is really on my heart. I don't want to see any more victims. This bill doesn't try to make any more victims. As I understand it, the issue on which you're dialoguing, which I welcome, is one of making sure that there aren't any more victims. I'm all for that. I just want to address the problem of intimate partner violence.

I invite your comments. Thank you.

• (1240)

The Chair: Who would like to begin?

[*Translation*]

Karine Barrette: I'll begin and you can carry on.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] testimony from February 12, that is, from the previous meeting, and I clearly sense the intent behind the bill. We are completely aligned with that intent.

We're simply talking about the adverse effects we're seeing on the ground. I'm referring to victims who ultimately won't be charged, but who are nevertheless arrested. On the ground, there is sometimes confusion between the obligation to report someone and the obligation to arrest them, so that some victims are afraid to call for help again, either from the police or the justice system in general. Knowing that it's first-degree murder, however, and that the sentence can be longer, there is added stress.

Are we throwing out the baby with the bathwater, to pick up on what Mrs. Vien said? That's not necessarily the case. We're really talking about putting guardrails in place, and there are various possibilities. We talked about having at least one amendment stating that there must be a pattern of coercive control, coercive and controlling conduct, for it to be first-degree murder. That would ensure that a victim is not charged as a result of reactive or defensive violence. We would look at the intent behind coercive control, because that's one of the determining factors in the pattern of behaviour. So that would be one of the guardrails.

There are other guardrails. Our group had the opportunity to go to Scotland, England and Australia, where control—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt, but Mr. Caputo's time is up.

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

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. It's always informative and enlightening.

Ms. Barrette, we ran into each other last summer when you were about to catch a flight. I see you nodding. It might be interesting to hear what is being done internationally to compare ourselves and perhaps adjust course as regards Bill C-225.

Have you observed any best practices or adjustments that could strengthen the bill in its current form? You are welcome to share your experiences.

Karine Barrette: Thank you very much.

As I was saying in conclusion [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in Australia, where coercive control has been criminalized. To begin, I would say that the analysis of the primary aggressor was a determining factor in the training of police officers, particularly in England and Scotland. There was this fear that victims would be [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] coercive—

[*English*]

The Chair: Sorry, we're having a couple of problems with the interpretation. I'm not sure if the technical folks can address it, but we'll press on. I think we're getting most of it.

If there are any comments that you want to make sure we have on the record and that you don't know if we got, feel free to send them to the clerk. We would be happy to get them.

We go back to you with your time. Thanks.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Karine Barrette: There are some insights there. In England and Scotland, victims were ultimately not charged with coercive control, because that concern had been raised beforehand and there had been training on the analysis of the primary aggressor.

In Australia, there have been other types of mechanisms, including a gender-based control mechanism. When women were charged, there was a kind of review committee that looked at the charges being laid, since we know those are very gender-based charges. That provided for a second look.

So there are mechanisms, but that is certainly a major fear that must not be ignored. The law can be dangerous if it is not accompanied by measures. Even if the legislative intent is good, if the legislation is not accompanied by practical training, across Canada, on the analysis of the primary aggressor and on understanding and screening for coercive control, we run the risk of creating a dangerous situation. That's why we're talking to you about these guardrails today.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you, Ms. Barrette.

Thank you to the sponsor of the bill, who is with us today. He made it clear that he was open and wanted to work in the best interests of victims and survivors. We all understood that he was inclined to be creative and to listen, in light of your testimony today.

Ms. Riendeau, did you really say that you would have trouble supporting Bill C-225 in its current form if it did not criminalize coercive control?

Louise Riendeau: The defining feature of domestic violence is indeed the presence of various forms of coercive control. That is how we can make the distinction between reactive violence and violence that is used to control. That is what we want to address today with Bill C-225.

If an amendment were adopted to better reflect that, that would be helpful because we know that offences committed against an intimate partner are often planned and intentional, for instance. So having specific offences is worthwhile, but we have to have the necessary safeguards. If we adopted an amendment that better reflects the context in which this violence occurs, I think that could be promising.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: That's very clear.

Ms. Anderson-Pyrz, our colleagues have just explained a lens that has to be applied, the gender lens. We have already talked about the cultural and identity lens. Now, let's talk about the territorial lens.

Canada is a huge country. Depending on where you live, you might not always get the same support.

Can you shed some light on that?

[*English*]

Hilda Anderson-Pyrz: When we're looking at Canada, especially at remote, isolated locations where many indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and gender-diverse people live, we see that often there are no resources. Additionally, we always seem to have

inexperienced, new recruits sent to our communities. Many are not fully aware of legislative changes or processes or don't have adequate training. So, there are many risk factors in addition to having the lack of supports and resources in our remote, isolated communities and even the lack of infrastructure. It's quite complex.

When you're looking at these types of amendments, there also has to be taken into consideration the lack of supports and resources, the lack of education around prevention in our communities and even the lack of understanding of what intimate partner violence is. When you're looking at how you support remote, isolated indigenous communities, you see that it's quite challenging when there is no real commitment of resources attached and you're looking at legislative amendments. They kind of have to go hand in hand. You have to add in the resources and commit to that in order to have an effective approach—

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I also want to thank the sponsor of the bill, Mr. Caputo, who is with us as well.

I have a number of questions.

We know that the reform also comes from Bailey's law. Let me also say that my thoughts are with the family of Bailey McCourt. She is the one we need to think of as we consider this bill.

The question is for the various witnesses, so just let us know if you would like to answer, Ms. Anderson-Pyrz, Ms. Riendeau, Ms. Barrette and Ms. Yaseen.

What factors are currently standing in the way of the proper administration of justice? What limits the work of police officers and the courts?

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Anderson-Pyrz.

Hilda Anderson-Pyrz: I think it's for the courts and the police to fully understand what the legislative amendments are and how they should respond adequately and be provided with training. Accountability mechanisms, as well, are really critical in this process. If we don't have accountability mechanisms, we're not going to be able to measure outcomes. It's really looking at it from the lens of education, awareness, training, implementation and having adequate resources.

I don't want to take up too much time; I want to give my sister space.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Louise Riendeau: I would add that what is missing at times is a full understanding or overview of what constitutes domestic violence. That is why training is important so that people can make connections and see that these are not isolated events, but rather events that can go unnoticed and that occur day after day. So we need to train all the partners so they consider that.

In addition, the Criminal Code talks about the principle of restraint, and we see that this poses significant challenges. Victim safety is one reason for keeping offenders in custody until they appear, but the code doesn't distinguish among various offences, which should be done in this specific case.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

For the rest of the panel, we have Ms. Roberts for three minutes and then Ms. Nathan for three minutes.

Ms. Roberts, please go ahead.

Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank everyone for being here today. I think the whole purpose of this committee is to ensure that we talk about victims. Let's talk about survivors. We want to make sure that women have the ability to survive these kinds of attacks. It's a non-partisan issue. We all agree with that.

I recall a witness in the summer of 2024 who really took my breath away. I listened to Cait Alexander explain what happened to her, how she feared for her life and how she had to leave this country because her perpetrator was still on the loose and to this day continues to do what he did to her.

My question is for Ms. Riendeau.

In your October 29, 2025, testimony before FEWO, before this committee, you said, "intimate partner violence is a specific type of crime. For a long time, it was justified and legitimized by the right of men to subject their spouse[s] [or partners] to their will."

In light of this, do you not believe in your heart and soul that Bill C-225, which was put forward by my colleague, could help protect women?

[Translation]

Louise Riendeau: As we said, we see the intent of the bill very clearly, which is to consider violence against women in the domestic context. Mr. Caputo talked about dialogue and we are taking part in that dialogue right now to ensure that there are as few adverse effects as possible. Indeed, the recognition of offences against women is certainly interesting. It's also interesting to see the possible link between various offences and the way we view control—

• (1255)

[English]

Anna Roberts: I'm sorry to interrupt, Ms. Riendeau. My whole point is that we've heard from many families of victims. They have lost their loved ones. The whole point of our committee is to ensure that we put laws in place so the criminals who are perpetrating crimes against these women are held to account. Today, they are not.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roberts.

We'll now go to Ms. Nathan for the final three minutes.

Juanita Nathan: This question is for the representative of the Barbra Schlifer clinic.

Women experiencing intimate partner violence are not monolithic. Indigenous women, migrant women, women with disabilities and women with insecure immigration status often face compounded barriers.

Between the punitive structure proposed in Bill C-225 and the pattern-based coercive control framework in Bill C-16, which model better reflects the lived realities of marginalized women and reduces unintended harm?

I will ask you another question and you can answer them together.

Court delays can lead to serious charges being dismissed. Bill C-16 introduces alternative remedies to prevent this, while respecting timely trial rights. How important are these charges for ensuring accountability and protecting victims?

Raneem Yaseen: I want to preface my answer by saying that I haven't looked into Bill C-16 in depth, so I am cautious of commenting on that and would stick to Bill C-225.

The legislative aspect of reform should always be coupled with education and training for gatekeepers in the legal system. The police play a gatekeeping role in that they decide who gets charged. Crown attorneys and judges also play a role. Having greater training about coercive control, for example, and how to identify it, since it's such a nuanced concept, will also ensure that.

In terms of the clients we see, in addition to facing criminalization, a lot of them are also dealing with housing issues and immigration precarity. In fact, while services are provided to clients at our clinic, between September 2022 and September 2025 we made 42 referrals to external programs, including housing, crisis centres and shelters. Reform in terms of criminalization should be coupled with social services and more funding for resources because, for survivors, the criminal process is not the end of their journey with IPV. They need to be able to adapt to the new realities they face.

Could you please repeat your second question?

Juanita Nathan: It's about the court delays leading to serious charges being dismissed.

How important are timely trials? How important are these charges for ensuring accountability in protecting victims?

Raneem Yaseen: That's a great question. Again, I think it's more focused on Bill C-16. I'd be happy to get back to you on that. Based on my knowledge of the project that I work on, I wouldn't have an answer at hand for you.

The Chair: That's the end of our time for the second panel today.

I want to thank all of our witnesses. Your testimony is very important to us. It will help inform us as we move forward.

For committee members, I want to remind you that the amendments for Bill C-225 are due by March 2.

I will see you all on Thursday for our consideration of the Criminal Code draft.

We are adjourned.

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