

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

May 21, 2026

Elder Justice Coalition Welcomes Progress on Coercive Control Reform



OTTAWA, ONTARIO – On May 4, 2026, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (Justice Committee) adopted an **amendment to Bill C-16, the *Protecting Victims Act*, requiring that Parliament initiate a review five years after the bill receives royal assent "to consider, among other things, the criminalization of coercive or controlling conduct in relationships other than intimate partner relationships."** The proposed amendment comes amid growing legal recognition in Canada of coercive and controlling behaviour as a serious form of family violence, including in **the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision in Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia.**

The Elder Justice Coalition recognizes the significance of the proposed offence's focus on coercive control in intimate partner relationships, and its predominant impact on women in this context. Coercive and controlling behaviour is widely understood to be a serious form of family violence and it is a well-established precursor to intimate partner homicide. The Coalition supports efforts to strengthen criminal law protections for domestic abuse victims.

In Ahluwalia, the Supreme Court recognized a new tort of intimate partner violence arising from patterns of coercive and controlling conduct. The Court emphasized the dependency, vulnerability, and breach of trust that can characterize coercive control in intimate partnerships. Although the case concerned intimate partner abuse in the civil law context, the Coalition welcomes this evolving legal recognition of coercive control as a serious form of interpersonal harm and the broader conversation it may prompt regarding other relationships characterized by trust, dependence, and vulnerability.

As Canadian law increasingly recognizes the serious harms associated with coercive control, the Coalition commends the Justice Committee for recognizing that coercive control also occurs in non-intimate partner contexts, including those involving relatives and caregivers of older adults. **“This review is a good signal that government recognizes the harmful consequences coercive and controlling behaviour can have on older Canadians,”** said Andrea Silverstone, CEO of Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society. “The Coalition appreciates the attention being given to this societal problem and the momentum it creates for reform.”

However, the Coalition believes that five years is too long to wait for further study and consultation. Coercive control affecting older adults outside intimate partner relationships is a pressing issue that demands more immediate legislative action. **“Delaying consideration leaves elder abuse victims without adequate criminal law protection from coercive and controlling behaviour by those they trust and depend on, including adult children, grandchildren, and caregivers,”** said Marta Hajek, CEO of Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario. **“The seriousness and prevalence of this harm warrant a more urgent response.”**

This significant delay places Canada behind other jurisdictions, such as England & Wales, which criminalized coercive control in both intimate and family relationships in 2015. **“The Justice Committee’s amendment is a meaningful step, but a five-year delay is difficult to justify given that there is over a decade of international experience to draw on,”** said Heather Campbell Pope, a lawyer and the founding director of Dementia Justice Canada. “Older adults experiencing coercive control by relatives and caregivers need timely recognition and protection under Canada’s criminal law.”

Bill C-16 provides a two-year coming-into-force period to allow the justice system, including law enforcement, to prepare for the new offence as it relates to intimate partners. **While the Coalition recognizes the practical considerations underlying implementation, it is not immediately clear why coercive control in relationships involving relatives would be excluded from that same preparatory timeline.** It seems reasonable to consider that this period could also be used to prepare police and other justice actors to recognize and respond to coercive control in the context of elder abuse.

At clause-by-clause consideration, the Justice Committee had an opportunity to include this broader scope within the existing two-year implementation and training period; however, an amendment to expand the scope to relatives was defeated. Although the Justice Committee's commitment to a future parliamentary review is an important acknowledgement of the issue, the Coalition remains concerned that elder abuse victims experiencing coercive control by family members and caregivers will continue to lack adequate criminal law protection in the meantime.

The Coalition looks forward to continuing to engage with parliamentarians to advance comprehensive and timely criminal law reform on coercive control for older Canadians.

ABOUT THE ELDER JUSTICE COALITION

The Elder Justice Coalition is an ad hoc group of organizations from across Canada calling for a coercive control offence to protect elder abuse victims.

More information

For more information on a proposed coercive control offence and elder abuse, please visit Dementia Justice Canada's [webpage](#).

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