

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Dear House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women,

I am adding my voice to the thousands of survivors of domestic violence in Canada who have been failed by the family court system.

I am a mother of four children, and am a survivor of intimate partner violence. I left my ex-husband in 2016 after years of emotional, verbal and occasional physical abuse, including threats on my life and threats of suicide. I took my children to a domestic violence shelter when I left, but this was given no consideration by the family court when handling my case.

Making the decision to leave is tortuous because we know it may mean that our abuser will get unsupervised access to our children, the ones we are desperate to protect by leaving.

In my case, though I presented evidence of a long history of abuse, as well as an investigation conducted by the Office of the Children's lawyer (in which my children divulged very concerning behaviour of their father) my ex was still given joint custody for decision making and secondary physical custody.

This has meant spending five years worrying about my children's safety and trying to protect them from their father's angry outbursts and abuse when I am not present. It has also meant being forced to consult with him on every decision involving our children's health or education or wellbeing, despite his ongoing use of coercive control towards me. It has also meant having to ask his permission to make crucial decisions, even though he is responsible for causing their most significant traumas and does not have their best interests at heart.

An abusive partner cannot also be a healthy parent.

When allegations of abuse are made in a family court case, the court must have the means to delve deeply into them and ascertain if they are accurate. Psychologists knowledgeable about domestic violence and abusive personalities are able to recognize the signs of aggressor and victim. Judges should be able to as well. They must learn about blame shifting, gaslighting and narcissistic abuse, terms and issues that have been regarded as taboo and dismissed as illegitimate.

This is an issue of enormous magnitude, as thousands of Canadian children are growing up with constant exposure to an unhealthy, abusive or dangerous parent. Thousands of healthy parents are in agony, helplessly forced to send their children to an abuser, or face being held in contempt of a court order.

Please take action on this very pressing matter.

Thank you,

Please keep my identity anonymous