



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ALBERTA

Hon. Leela Sharon Aheer, MLA
Chestermere-Strathmore

Regarding Coercive Control

I am writing to support Bill C-233: an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Judges Act (violence against an intimate partner).

I want to begin by thanking those courageous enough to come forward with their stories, ideas, and solutions, as we join together in ending gender-based violence. I want to thank you for standing up for human rights! For sharing your pain, trauma, strength, and resilience. I want to thank you for inspiring me as an elected official to lend my voice to the dialogue. It has been a privilege to sit at many tables, both as an elected official around official tables and as a friend at your kitchen tables.

We have seen some very good and necessary changes in advocacy, thought, and discussion surrounding the topic of domestic violence. One thing that I have learned, and I humbly present, is that these changes need to happen now. There has been more than adequate consultation and sharing of information proving the need for legislation that will make the laws more effective, thereby making gender-based violence harder to perpetuate.

We need to protect those who are imprisoned by fear, lack of funds, culture, stigma and stand strongly with our partners to say a loud and clear "no" to intimate partner violence. We need strong advocacy, and we need to deal with systemic issues. This will require courage, honesty, strength, and compassion amongst our leaders and lawmakers. Laws need to reflect the needs of families and be a tool in helping families during a crisis. Changes in supports will require more than dollars. It will require a shift in how we protect those in harm's way and the creation of laws to support the safe communities, so many of us have had a part in building.

The systemic issues impact people of all genders, though more women are victims and survivors of violence. Women have carried this burden since the beginning of time, and it will be strong and resilient women collaborating in their advocacy for all genders to end this abuse. Indigenous and rural women are even further impacted due to isolation and lack of services. Immigrant women make up a huge proportion of women in Canada, and if we are going to say that women and girls are safe in Canada, then they need to be safe in Canada. No exception! Equality benefits everyone, and it benefits the economy, reduces the burdens to the health system, and builds healthy communities. We must have the cultural competencies to raise awareness and take the necessary steps to involve and include everyone to hold us all accountable to keep our women and our children safe.

Coercive control involves utilizing different tactics to create an unequal power dynamic within an intimate partnership. One of these tactics is division. Division is about control; it is about isolation and



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lack of inclusion, which is a powerful manipulation tool. Division will always be used as a tactic by those in a powerful positions to gain their desired outcome. It will be up to us to help determine, within the law, what we can do to mitigate issues before they escalate to verbal or physical violence. Our system needs to better understand this tool and find ways to legislate against it.

The necessary changes should, quite frankly, be implemented for the well-being of anyone caught in an abusive relationship with an intimate partner. Education is the solution, and advocacy is every single person's responsibility. We must stop retraumatizing those who have told their truth - laid this path for us and open our arms to those who have managed to flee abuse. Other countries have successfully acknowledged the need to include coercive control in their law-making process. It is our time, and the world will no longer wait for us to try. It is now a matter of must!

We must be one voice and quite simply have a zero-tolerance policy for acts of coercive manipulation in the family, justice, business, and institutions. This is about understanding where we are as a nation and taking that courageous step that many victims and survivors have taken in stride as they await lawmakers and society to see them, understand them, believe them, and fight for them! We as women have removed barriers with allies, and we have fought to be not only at the tables but to have our competencies acknowledged equally with our counterparts. Human trafficking, FGM, honour beatings, honour killings, and child marriage can only continue because we are afraid and prefer the status quo. The world will no longer be ok with the status quo. We women - who make up 51% of the population - will no longer be ok with the status quo. Men, who are our allies and forge this path alongside us, will no longer be ok with the status quo.

Effective change is both progressive and continuous. This is not an ideological or politicized conversation. The question we need to ask ourselves is whether our efforts, our funding, and our policies have led to real change? Has abuse been reduced? Have we funded and facilitated prevention?

This will be a test and one that we cannot fail as Canadians. This is truly about the future of our children. We will need to recognize the signs and be willing to reach out, without judgment, to help our neighbours. We need to be active bystanders and help educate our children about healthy relationships. It is time for our voices to be heard and say the words "coercive control". We must understand that ignoring this piece of the puzzle only perpetuates the cycle of domestic violence. We need a different path.

Let's take the path that leads to change. And let's do it because we know we can do better. Regardless of who you are, who you pray to, who you love, or where you come from, you deserve to feel safe,



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valued, loved, and understood. We may not be able to legislate compassion, but we can surely create legislation that stands for what is right.

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