

February 26, 2021

To: The House of Commons' Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

**RE: Bill C-247**

**Statement of the Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario (FDRIO)**

The Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario (FDRIO) is a federally incorporated not-for-profit that provides certifications, networking and advocacy for Ontario family mediators, family arbitrators, parenting coordinators, financial professionals, coaches, mental health professionals, and other professionals who serve family law clients. We have created a comprehensive set of Standards of Practice including Guidelines for Screening for Power Imbalances and Family Violence (including but not limited to coercive control), for the benefit of our members and the public. We feel that we are uniquely qualified to provide insight on the topic of controlling and coercive behavior as it relates to families, and the many members of society who are impacted by it.

Coercive control is a complex and multi-faceted issue. Responding to it appropriately and effectively requires many sensitivities including those around crisis response, victim support, family dynamics, all forms of trauma, race, culture, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation, and other intersectional issues. The interconnectivity with other areas of law, specifically: family; child protection; elder; criminal, including youth criminal justice; mental health; employment; and immigration need to be taken into account when considering this issue. Significant training needs for not only those first responders, but all related support systems add to the practical and logistical requirements of enforcement, as well as ensuring such an amendment is used fairly, reasonably, proportionately, and effectively.

When dealing with issues related to families the tenet of ***do no harm*** must serve as a foundational and overarching principle. This proposed amendment to the criminal code must ensure that no harm or revictimization occurs, at any point, as a result of the legislation; and that the offence is clearly defined, free from ambiguity, and applied equally.

Moreover, there must be an acknowledgement and understanding that coercive and controlling behavior does not cease as a result of separation, criminal charges, or convictions – and can often times be aggravated by those same factors. Not only do survivors of coercive control need to be protected and adequately supported, but causers of harm need to be educated and rehabilitated. Amendments to the criminal code must ensure diversion, re-education, and

rehabilitation programs are available to provide the emotional and mental health assistance to those convicted, so that they can be part of breaking the cycle, as opposed to perpetuating it. FDRIO supports creating awareness and education of controlling and coercive conduct and would appreciate the opportunity of time to provide a fulsome submission that we believe will assist in the ongoing path of Bill C-247.

Sincerely,

The Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario