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MEDIA RELEASE

COERCIVE CONTROL BEHAVIOUR SET TO BE ADDRESSED IN NSW

The Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control tabled its report on coercive control in domestic relationships today. The inquiry unanimously agreed that coercive control should be criminalised.

This follows five days of hearings in February and March and a visit to regional NSW, during which the Committee heard evidence from more than 100 witnesses. The Committee has received more than 150 submissions (equating to more than 3,500 pages) from stakeholders, domestic violence services, victim-survivors and other jurisdictions.

Committee Chair the Hon. Natalie Ward MLC said this report is a step forward for victim survivors of coercive control.

"We heard evidence of terror, murder, and heartbreak, and of bare survival in the lives of women and children. It became apparent that we have an obligation to do more to address a very obvious gap in current laws," said Mrs Ward.

Coercive control is a pattern of abuse involving physical, sexual, psychological or financial manipulation in domestic relationships. Journalist and author Jess Hill has described it as a "system of entrapment", with perpetrators "isolating a person from friends and family, depriving them of basic needs, monitoring them through online communication tools or spyware, taking wages and benefits, threats to reveal or publish personal information, threats to harm a child, threats to hurt or kill."

The Committee heard evidence that coercive control is a precursor to intimate partner homicide. The Domestic Violence Death Review Team found that 99 per cent – 111 out of 112 – of intimate partner homicides between 2008 and 2016 in NSW were preceded by coercive control.

"Given the facts, we cannot ignore this phenomenon. While we don't wish to intervene in ordinary respectful relationships, the evidence before us demonstrated that these patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour are red flags for murder. Accordingly, it should be criminalised in NSW, as it has been in Scotland and other jurisdictions.

"Criminalising coercive control will not immediately end all domestic abuse. But lives might be saved if we recognise that certain patterns of non-consensual behaviour must be seen together, because they are often a warning of the potential for preventable and recognisable patterns preceding domestic homicide," said Mrs Ward.

The Committee made 23 recommendations which aim to ensure that legal and non-legal systems better respond to coercive control.

The Committee found that a coercive control offence won't be effective without a long lead time, wide public education campaigns, training for first responders, and wraparound supports for victims. These supports will address possible risks, including over criminalisation, and misidentification of victims by police.

"The Committee's view is that legislating to criminally recognise coercive control can only be undertaken with an extensive implementation process, including consultation, education, resources and lead-time, if it is to succeed," Mrs Ward said.

The report can be found at <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/ladocs/inquiries/2626/Report%20-%20coercive%20control%20in%20domestic%20relationships.pdf>.

For confidential advice, support and referrals related to domestic and family violence, contact 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732), the NSW Domestic Violence Line (1800 656 463) or the Men's Referral Service (1300 766 491).

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