

Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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Submitted by:	Louise Smith
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Submission to the Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Submitted by: Louise Smith (publicly known as Lou Feltham Smith)

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Mailing address: [REDACTED]

I am making this submission as a survivor of domestic abuse and someone who now mentors and supports other women escaping abuse through my charity, Miracle Mums Movement Inc.

While I support efforts to protect victim-survivors more efficiently, I hold serious concerns about the proposed power to allow police to issue on-the-spot police protection directions without the full picture of the history of the relationship. This reform, while well-intended, risks opening the door to dangerous misidentification and misuse—especially in complex, coercively controlling relationships where abusers are skilled in manipulation and victims-survivors are displaying signs of trauma and are unable to communicate effectively as a result of having their nervous system triggered.

My Experience

Eight years ago, I escaped an abuser with my three young children. Since then, I've rebuilt our lives and now support others through their own journeys of recovery. I've also navigated the legal system through Magistrates Court in an attempt to obtain Protection Orders.

My ex-partner weaponised the legal system to try to control and discredit me. He denied the abuse, manipulated authorities, and attempted to frame me as unstable by triggering trauma responses during police or court involvement. I've seen other women go through the same—especially when officers aren't trained in trauma-informed practice or in recognising coercive control patterns. These women are often retraumatised when the wrong person is seen as the aggressor or simply not believed at all.

Another critical issue is the frequent minimisation by police of reports of coercive controlling behaviours, including stalking. I've personally supported women who have been told their experiences don't meet the threshold for intervention, despite clearly aligning with legislative criteria. Often, victims are informed that police must contact the perpetrator for their version of events allowing time to fabricate a defence that is frequently accepted at

face value before even lodging a police report. This retraumatises the victim and increases their fear of retaliation if the perpetrator learns they have involved police. This approach is not trauma-informed and severely undermines victims' safety and trust in the system.

Concerns About the Bill

- On-the-spot directions risk being made in high-stress, high-conflict moments where trauma responses are misread.
- Coercive, manipulative offenders may use cross-application strategies to trigger police intervention and silence the victim.
- Without oversight from a Magistrate, there is no independent check on the accuracy or fairness of the direction issued.
- Police do not appear to be adequately trained to understand the complexities of trauma behaviour, or how coercive control operates without physical violence in my expert opinion.

Recommendations

1. Require same-day or next-day court oversight of all police protection directions.
2. Ensure all directions issued by police are subject to internal supervisory review to prevent misuse.
3. Mandate specialist training for all police officers and QPS staff, court staff including Magistrates & Judges in coercive control, DARVO, risk assessment, trauma responses and victim and perpetrator psychology prior to exercising this power.
4. Mandate the use of thorough timeline-based assessment tools that consider the full relationship history. Namely the DASH, DARA & TITRA as used in the UK.
5. Involve expertly trained and lived experience advocates and survivor-led organisations in training, monitoring, and evaluation.

This Bill must be trauma-informed and abuse-informed in its application. Any new power must come with built-in protections to ensure it doesn't harm the very people it aims to protect.

Thank you for considering my submission.



Urgent Concerns Regarding Police-Issued Protection Directions

From Lou Feltham Smith [REDACTED]

Date Tue 29/04/2025 8:24 PM

To Kerri-Anne Dooley MP - Member for Redcliffe [REDACTED]

Hi Kerri-Anne,

Thank you so much for letting me know about your meeting with Amanda Camm tomorrow. I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to have these concerns raised.

As a survivor and an advocate who works closely with victim-survivors of domestic abuse, I'm extremely concerned about the proposed reforms allowing general duty officers to issue 12-month Protection Directions on the spot. While I fully acknowledge the intent is to protect those at risk, without adequate training in identifying coercive control and understanding trauma responses, these powers may unintentionally place victims in even greater danger.

A common tactic used by perpetrators is DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim/Offender), which can result in victims appearing confused, unstable, or even aggressive—particularly when in a heightened trauma state. Without specialised training, officers may easily misidentify the primary aggressor.

Another critical issue is the frequent minimisation by police of reports of coercive controlling behaviours, including stalking. I've supported women who have been told their experiences don't meet the threshold for intervention, despite clearly aligning with legislative criteria. Often, victims are informed that police must contact the perpetrator for their version of events allowing time to fabricate a defence that is frequently accepted at face value before even lodging a report. This retraumatises the victim and increases their fear of retaliation if the perpetrator learns they have involved police. This approach is not trauma-informed and severely undermines victims' safety and trust in the system.

In the UK, frontline officers use the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and Honour-Based Violence) risk assessment tool, developed by Laura Richards, a criminal behavioural analyst and former head of New Scotland Yard's Violent Crime Prevention Unit, to identify high-risk cases. Laura has also worked with the Queensland Government on the state's coercive control reforms. I am trained in the DASH, as well as a more comprehensive tool called TITRA (Trauma-Informed Timeline Risk Assessment), which provides a clear overview of patterns of abuse, helping police understand the full context of the relationship rather than treating incidents in isolation.

Additionally, I'm currently completing the Trauma-Informed Advocacy & Expert Witness Certification under the guidance of Kate Beesley, a UK-based domestic abuse specialist, DASH risk assessor, and founder of *Say No to Domestic Abuse and Stalking*. Kate has extensive training in trauma and the core issues surrounding violence against women and girls. She has developed a short training course specifically for law enforcement to strengthen their understanding of trauma-informed practice, which I would be willing to present if helpful.

I respectfully urge the government to ensure any rollout of these reforms includes mandatory training in coercive control, DARVO dynamics, and trauma-informed practice, alongside the consistent use of

proven risk assessment tools. I am more than willing to support this work and offer lived-experience-informed insight to help ensure these reforms truly protect those they are intended to serve.

Thank you again for your support and for raising these concerns on my behalf.



Lou Feltham Smith



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