

CRIMINAL LAW (COERCIVE CONTROL AND AFFIRMATIVE CONSENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2023

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Submitter Comments:

It is essential that Queensland implements Coercive Control legislation in order to protect women from the (often) insidious, covert and harmful impacts of men who use violence against women in Queensland. This coercive control is often evident long after a relationship with a perpetrator ends, and seems to go under the radar of (or is nonchalantly dismissed by) authorities despite women's (ongoing) cries for help. As a victim survivor, I endured domestic violence featuring emotional, financial, physical and sexual violence by a man living in Brisbane, throughout 2020 and into 2021. Throughout this relationship, I was intimately injured and significantly harmed. When I calmly ended the relationship in January 2021, this man threw a tantrum, raged at me, threatened me, and would not accept it then engaged in further coercive control by stalking me covertly and working his way through my support circles to smear me and socially isolate me. This included manipulating and befriending my long term friends and contacts, and stewarding them to hassle me on his behalf; frequenting places and spaces wherein I socialized (as a means to intimidate and harass me); and spreading caustic and untrue rumours about me within social circles. He attempted to contact and befriend my siblings on LinkedIn and Facebook, after I cut all contact with him, and organized 3 of his ex partners to intimidate me in my social spaces, at my workplace, online, and also via my email address. I endured a private nightmare with this man for 9 months (as his intimate partner) and was subjected to the most hideous abuse behind closed doors in my own home only to be further impacted after I made the decision to terminate the relationship and cut all ties with him completely. With regard to his chronic stalking behaviour (which continued long after I ended the relationship), he blatantly lied to police about the situation, despite undeniable evidence of his actions. I lodged repeated police reports for a year, with evidence (including photos and footage of his stalking, as well as screenshots of his elicitation of others to contact me on his behalf) to no apparent avail. As a canny man with the gift of the gab and highly tuned manipulation skills, he seemed proficient at convincing anyone and everyone of his alleged innocence (including authorities). This blatant lying impacted my safety and wellbeing, as well as my ability (and legal right) to seek the protections I required to be free of his harassment and control. I was harassed by carriage for approximately a year after I ended the relationship frequent phone calls on private numbers, nonsense phone calls, unsolicited messages on Facebook, fake friend requests on Facebook, and ongoing hacking on Facebook. This coercive and covert behaviour continued for approximately 18 or 19 months from the time I ended the relationship until he went overseas to take on a job contract in August 2022 (by which time, I'd changed address, jobs, changed social circles, cancelled all social media, and was living off the grid as a complete recluse). Coercive control harms women in multi faceted ways that are not overtly apparent to the onlooker. I cannot show you a black eye or a broken arm because I don't have one. I cannot show you intimate injuries because these are on the inside of my body. I cannot show you the ways in which this man harangued me for hours in my own bedroom, blockaded me in my own home, and refused to leave my property because I was too intimidated to call the police at the time. I cannot show you how this man raged at me in my own bedroom for hours on end during the January 2021 lockdown, or any other time, when I was so confused and baffled by his aggression that I just froze. But it is real and it happened. I cannot show you the welt on my backside from the time he picked up a rod of dowl in my home and hit me with it "as a joke", then told me I am "overly sensitive" and can't take a joke. That welt has gone now, but the memories have not. What I can do is attest to the fact that this man's behaviour towards women follows a pattern, and is pathological in nature. I can attest to the fact that he has treated other women like this and will likely go on to harm other women in exactly

the same ways, well into the future. No one will believe those women either, or support them, or hear their evidence... because of the very fact that his behaviour is coercive, calculated, careful and manipulative. This experience was preventable if coercive control laws were in place.

In saying this, it is vital that several things be considered before implementing coercive control legislation in Queensland:

1. The fact that DFV is gendered: the statistics overwhelmingly support the fact that it is men who commit violence against women and girls in this country. Statistics are evidence based data that show where the issue is.
2. The fact that the majority of rapes and sexual violence by male perpetrators occurs within the context of an intimate and/ or known relationship and also goes unreported. Just because a sexual offence is unreported or results in a non conviction does not mean that the offence did not occur.
3. The fact that it is men who commit these crimes and also men who are also in the positions of power to take reports about this behaviour (or not).
4. The fact that is a well established fact that male perpetrators commonly use legal processes to further harm their female victims (e.g., vexatious DVOs, retaliatory DVOs, cross applications, vexatious litigation, etc.). Indeed, it is a concern that male perpetrators may well use coercive control legislation in this exact manner and I am highly concerned by this very realistic possibility.
5. The consideration of Clare's Law (or a similar database system) re perpetrators and repeat offenders is necessary, to prevent further harm to women.

In my situation, I learnt that the perpetrator had a prior history of violence against women including financial, emotional, physical and sexual which went unreported and under the radar of authorities. Knowing this upfront would have provided me the agency to make an informed decision about the situation that I found myself in, with an initially charming, charismatic man who used love bombing, grooming and predatory tactics to position me exactly where he needed me to be in order to exert dominance, abuse, power tactics, and coercive control over me.

In summary, I support Coercive Control Law reform in Queensland but only under the proviso that it considers the evidence based data about male perpetrators (as outlined in points 1-5, above).