




Speech By
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DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION (COMBATING COERCIVE CONTROL) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (3.58 pm): The Palaszczuk government is committed to preventing domestic and family violence from occurring in our communities and that is why we are legislating against coercive control. At the outset I say how proud I am that Queensland will be one of the first jurisdictions in the world to do so. I am so proud to be part of a parliament that is making this change. Coercive control is a term that many Queenslanders only really heard for the first time a few years ago when Hannah Clarke and her beautiful children sadly lost their lives. What I saw in my community at this time was an awareness that was starting to be created that some of the clusters of behaviour from perpetrators that previously did not have a name that we could put to them were, in fact, part of an insidious pattern of behaviour that had far-reaching impacts on the women and the children caught in these relationships. For some women and their friends, they realised for the first time that the behaviour of their partners or their former partners had a name and that it was not just impacting on their mental health and the way they felt about themselves, it actually was in many cases an indicator that their physical safety was at risk.

There are many aspects of this bill. I want to touch on the emergence of all kinds of technology and their impact and the ability that this has given to perpetrators and dangerous partners who can now use, in ways that they could not 10 or 20 years ago, people's phones, household cameras and other kinds of technology to track their partners.

I experienced this firsthand a few years ago through the friend of a friend who was being stalked by her former partner, which included all kinds of technological surveillance. They stayed at my house overnight so that they could debug their house. Out of an abundance of caution, we sought advice from a DV assistance group, which did a great job. They suggested all kinds of strategies such as turning off phones so that the perpetrator could not track them to the house. We even took a different car to my house so that he could not track her car if he had bugged it. That is how far we went.

The next morning, while my husband and his family were building in the backyard, her former partner—we had never met him before and he had never been to our house—came through our gate. As I said, we had never met that man before. The only way he could have found our house was by tracking his former partner's phone, which was switched off. Luckily, my husband and his parents were able to escort him off the property. He never saw his daughters and his former partner, who were just inside the house only a few metres from where he was standing. That was a pretty scary experience. It is so important to note that he was able to do that by using technology from the cameras that they had in their home, which he had installed, and their home computers. Finally he tracked their phones and he might have even tried tracking her car. It is worth reflecting on the fact that he could keep really close tabs on his partner at all times and she would never know when he was watching her because of all the surveillance that was installed. It is incumbent on all of us to be aware that technology, while so useful in some ways, can easily be abused like this by perpetrators.

No matter the specific types of abuse that victims experience, one behaviour that many victims identify with is the cycle of abuse. You experience incredibly loving and apologetic behaviour afterwards. It is a honeymoon period, if you will, with a promise to never do it again. I witnessed this close up and firsthand in my early 20s when I saw a friend, who was like a sister to me, experience a coercive control relationship that eventually turned violent. She has given me permission to share her story today, which I appreciate because it profoundly informed my views of domestic violence and the many different forms it can take.

From early in the relationship it was obvious to everyone that my friend's partner was mercurial. When we met him he was the definition of charming. He was lovely, interesting, interested in us and very affectionate. However, when we were out I often saw my friend on the phone reasoning with him and cajoling him. She was always being accused of some imaginary wrongdoing. Those cycles would conclude with a vicious verbal outburst from her partner. There would be a big blow-up followed by a period of calm and a lovely honeymoon phase. Watching this behaviour and the impact that it had on my friend, I knew deep in my heart of hearts that he was abusive. There was something wrong with his behaviour. It was abusive to try to make someone doubt their own behaviour and to make them second-guess whether it was even worth leaving the house that day because he would be so upset when he got home. To monitor your partner's every move is abusive.

However, I did not have the confidence to intervene. That was until a few years into the relationship when she called me very early in the morning, in tears, because after a very long barrage of verbal abuse the night before she had turned around and she hit him. He responded by immediately calling the police. She was frantic. She did not know what to do. The next day it was as if the altercation had never happened. I could now confidently say, 'You need to get out' because I could put a name on it: it was domestic violence. Later on I realised that that was what he had wanted all along and that it would have been only a matter of time until he hit her back. Back then what I did not realise was that, of course, that relationship had always been abusive.

I sat my friend down and told her what I thought. To my absolute amazement she packed her stuff and she never went back. I am eternally grateful that she did that. I am so grateful that we had a good outcome, but I know that many women do not. Looking back now, I know that her partner spent their entire relationship trying to isolate her, humiliate her and gaslight her but, like so many Queenslanders at that time, I did not have the knowledge or the vocabulary to call it for what it was.

This bill gives effect to the recommendations. Critical amendments in this legislation will ensure that the offence of coercive control can be effective in reducing domestic and family violence while also mitigating any unintended consequences such as the misidentification of the primary aggressor, which is a particular issue for First Nations women and girls. As I outlined earlier, my friend was incredibly lucky that when the police came that night they correctly identified that she was not the aggressor in the relationship. She was very lucky. That is what this legislation will seek to underpin and enshrine.

The bill amends the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012 to include 'pattern of behaviour' in the definition of 'domestic and family violence'. I have just spoken about the insidious pattern of behaviour that we saw from my friend's partner over a number of years, which culminated in a physical altercation that I have no doubt would have gone both ways had she stayed any longer. Domestic violence includes behaviour that occurs over a period. It includes individual acts that, when considered cumulatively, are abusive, threatening, coercive and cause fear. Under the new definition my friend's partner and many other women's relationships would be clearly captured because the aim is to shift the focus from responding to a single incident of violence to the dangerous patterns of abusive behaviour that occur over time.

I know that my friend's experience is incredibly common. We heard story after story after story from the amazing and brave women who came forward to inform the *Hear her voice* report. It is a landmark report. In addition to those brave people who put their voices forward for the parliament to hear and legislate on, I believe that everybody in this chamber and, indeed, everybody in Queensland knows somebody who this legislation will help or could have helped. We know that in part because of the *Hear her voice* report and because of the many women who shared their stories in that forum and with their local members. They have asked for help. As legislators, we have seen clear patterns emerge and we know that passing this legislation in this House is absolutely and fundamentally the right thing to do.

I finish by recognising everyone who has shared their story, whether in an official forum or in any other way. That can be really traumatic. It can be really tough. Your stories have helped inform this legislation and everything that is still to come before the Queensland parliament to stop the scourge of domestic violence. Thank you for speaking up even though it can be really tough to do so. I commend the bill to the House.