



Speaking Notes

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Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Regarding **Bill C-225, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code***

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The Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS) is the member association for agencies that provide shelter and counselling services to survivors of intimate partner violence in Saskatchewan. PATHS conducts research, delivers training for professionals, engages in advocacy, and serves as the collective voice for front-line intimate partner violence professionals in Saskatchewan.

On behalf of PATHS, I am pleased to share our support for Bill C-225, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code*, known as Bailey's Law.

Over 120,000 victims of intimate partner violence came to the attention of police in the last reported year.¹ In a ten-year period, there were over 900 domestic homicides in Canada.² Intimate partner violence has severe consequences not just for primary victims who suffer physical injuries; psychological, emotional, and economic impacts; isolation; and persistent fear as a result of the perpetrators' behaviour or who are murdered by current or former partners—intimate partner violence has serious impacts for collateral victims including family, friends, workplaces, and communities. Dozens of children lose their mothers to intimate partner homicide every year in Canada.³

Given the prevalence of and serious harms associated with intimate partner violence, including coercive or controlling conduct, and intimate partner homicide (femicide), it is necessary that Canada strengthen *Criminal Code* provisions to deal with perpetrators. This includes detention after violence has occurred to mitigate the risk of continued and escalating violence and sentencing to increase accountability and public safety.

This Bill stands to make several important amendments to Canada's *Criminal Code*. Based on my research, including with survivors of intimate partner violence and professionals who work with survivors and perpetrators, as well as what we hear from PATHS member agencies, and

¹ Statistics Canada. (2024). *Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2023*. The Daily: October 24, 2024. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/241024/dq241024b-eng.pdf>

² Burczykca, M. (2019). Section 2: Police-reported intimate partner violence in Canada, 2018. In *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2018*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00018/02-eng.htm>

³ Dawson, M., Sutton, D., Jaffe, P., Straatman, A. L., & Poon, J. (2021). *One is too many: 10 years of domestic homicides in Canada*. Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative. http://www.cdhpi.ca/sites/cdhpi.ca/files/cdhpi-report-final_0.pdf

evidence gathered by Domestic Violence Death Reviews conducted across Canada and the work of the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, I feel that these changes have the potential to enhance safety for survivors, increase accountability for perpetrators, and prevent future deaths.

Bailey McCourt was killed by her estranged husband. Decades of research and death reviews in Canada have highlighted the increased danger and need for additional protections after separation. My current research at PATHS involves survivors' experiences with the legal system,⁴ and when collecting the data for this study, I heard from many women who continued to experience post-separation abuse and coercive control for years after the relationship ended.

We are in favour of the creation an offence of murder in the first degree and the consideration of a sentence of life imprisonment for manslaughter when these offences are committed in the context of a pattern of coercive or controlling conduct. Research by Dr. Myrna Dawson⁵ highlighted the intimacy discount in Canadian criminal legal outcomes where men who kill their intimate partners or other female family members receive shorter sentences of incarceration than men who kill non-familial victims. Bailey's Law seeks to ensure that perpetrators who kill their partners or former partners receive a sentence commensurate with the severity of their crime.

The provisions regarding reverse onus bail for accused persons charged with violent offences against intimate partners within this Bill also stand to make an important impact. Canadian research demonstrates high rates of recidivism among perpetrators of intimate partner violence.⁶ Many individuals who have assaulted their partners in the past do so again, often within a relatively short timeframe. Further, many repeat the pattern of intimate partner violence in their next relationship.

Unfortunately, risk management strategies such as Peace Bonds often do not deter perpetrators of intimate partner violence from continuing their pattern of behaviour. In my current research regarding survivors' experiences with the legal system, 78% of women whose former partner was subject to a Peace Bond, protective order, or no contact conditions reported that their partner did not abide by the conditions.⁴ Bailey's estranged husband was convicted of assault and released pending sentencing the same day that he killed her. It is absolutely necessary that risk for continued intimate partner violence is taken into account in bail decisions.

PATHS has advocated for the provisions in Bill C-16, *An Act to amend certain Acts in relation to criminal and correctional matters (child protection, gender-based violence, delays and other measures)* (Protecting Victims Act) regarding coercion or control of an intimate partner.^{7, 8} We appreciate the coordinating amendments in Bill C-225 to ensure cohesion. The legislative amendments proposed by Bill C-225 serve to work together with Bill C-16 and other legislation, including the *Divorce Act*, to recognize coercive control in law. Bailey's Law recognizes coercive

⁴ This research project is currently underway, and published findings will be forthcoming. Publications will be posted on pathssk.org when available and can be obtained by contact crystal@pathssk.org.

⁵ Dawson, M. (2016). Punishing femicide: Criminal justice responses to the killing of women over four decades. *Current Sociology*, 64(7), 996–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115611192>

⁶ For example: Hilton, N. Z., Harris, G. T., Popham, S., & Lang, C. (2010). Risk assessment among incarcerated male domestic violence offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 37(8), 815–832. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854810368937>

⁷ Giesbrecht, C. J. (2023, October). *Submission to the Department of Justice Canada regarding a potential coercive control offence in the context of intimate relationships*. Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS). <https://pathssk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/C-Giesbrecht-PATHS-Submission-Potential-Coercive-Control-Offence-Oct-2023.pdf>

⁸ Giesbrecht, C. J. (2026, June). *Brief submitted to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Regarding Bill C-16, An Act to amend certain Acts in relation to criminal and correctional matters (child protection, gender-based violence, delays and other measures)* (Protecting Victims Act). Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS). <https://pathssk.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/PATHS-Brief-Bill-C16-Protecting-Victims-Act-June-2026.pdf>

or controlling conduct as a harmful and life-threatening form of intimate partner abuse and offers tangible solutions for increasing accountability for perpetrators and safety for victims.

In July, it will be one year since Bailey McCourt was killed. I urge the Senate to support Bill C-225 to amend the *Criminal Code*. If this Bill can prevent one woman from being killed by an ex-partner like Bailey was, it will be worth it. But given the high rates of intimate partner violence and murder in this country, we know that the impact will be far greater.

Sincere thanks for allowing me to share my support for this important Bill.