

Individual 5

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Both myself and my partner would like to give some feedback on this intended bill, based upon personal experience in the hope that the bill can be implemented in practical terms and address issues which have impeded us from taking any action against our abusers.

Our main concern comes from how the coercive and emotional control can be evidenced and in our experience the abuser has always been the initiator in any police action. Their false allegations can detract from any actual events and lead police to be unsure of whom to believe. In turn this would involve both the abuser and the survivor having to provide any evidence forcing the survivor always into a defense of any alleged action.

From what we are led to believe from the bill, the main enforcer and point of contact for coercive control and emotional abuse allegations would be the PSNI, speaking from experience as a survivor of emotional abuse, this is not an action we ever would willingly take as it can be a difficult situation to try and explain due to the very personal nature, the fear of not taking the situation as seriously as it demands, and as a male survivor, not being believed.

Once having left an abusive relationship, the abuser continues to try to exert control and in both of our cases the coercive control increased eg. Financially, control of children contact, excluded from family home, isolation from friends, family and work colleagues and via social media.

The proposed bill needs to have practical advice for measures that a victim / survivor should follow during and after leaving an abusive relationship, and one which they would feel safe and secure in doing so ie. Calling police would normally be considered for emergencies or potential physical harm and not coercive control.

In our situations where issues with children have been involved, the police have passed on any allegations to social services, this leads to a more formal process with having to potentially defend any allegations and furthering the trauma of abuse. Our experience has seen both of our abusers willingly use the systems (police, social workers, solicitors and family courts) to continue their abuse without valid foundation. Some heed must be taken to the fact that whilst living with the abuser and still being subject to coercive control, contacting the police could make the situation much worse.

In order to have trust in this new bill it would be preferable to see an independent body of some description involving trained relationship and family specialists to be able to liaise with any involved parties, help with evidence gathering and assist police.

In terms of cases involving children, we have been involved with both social services and police, to whom we have told that our children [REDACTED] are currently suffering similar abuse and coercive control from their parent, [REDACTED]. Perhaps due to current legislation this was not taken with the severity it should. In these cases when dealing with social services it can be a difficult process of either parent placing blame and social services not wishing to get involved but caring only for the child's physical wellbeing before closing a case.

Our experience to date has been one of seeing our abusers manipulate the current systems to their own benefit in a manner of continuing their abuse as it ultimately affects the survivor in a psychologically detrimental way. We would hope that this new bill have safeguards to ensure that it not be abused in the same manner.

We very much welcome this new legislation and hope that it act as a deterrent as much as an enforcer.

Thank you to all parties involved in the briefing paper.

Kind regards.

