

Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Re: 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)

Date: Mar 25, 2026

Introduction

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on Bill C-16. We commend the federal government initiatives to criminalize coercive control in intimate partner relationships. However, CARP is concerned with the limited scope of the bill as it does not adequately reflect how coercive control manifests in the lives of older Canadians. Without amendment, it will exclude a significant number of victims.

CARP is a non-partisan, non-profit association that advocates for financial security, healthcare, freedom from ageism, and aging with dignity. With over 250,000 members and a community of local chapters from coast to coast, CARP is the largest senior advocacy organization that advocates on behalf of older Canadians with all levels of government.

CARP recommends that Bill C-16 be amended to expand the scope of the coercive control offence to include:

- 1) Current or former intimate partners
- 2) Relatives
- 3) Informal caregivers (defined as those having an informal care relationship, whether paid or unpaid, other than those covered by regulated professional services).

Coercive Control in Elder Abuse

Coercive control is defined as a pattern of controlling behavior that takes place over time in the context of intimate partner relationships, as well as familial relationships, and

serves to “entrap” victims, eliminating their sense of freedom in the relationship.¹ In this sense, older Canadians are more likely to experience abuse from family members than from intimate partners. According to Statistics Canada, 36% of older adult victims of family violence were victimized by their child, compared to 28% from spouses.² When combined with abuse by siblings (11%) and extended family (25%), the majority of elder abuse occurs outside of intimate partner relationships in Canada.³

While it is estimated that abuse affects between 4% and 10% of older adults in Canada, only 1 in 5 incidents of elder abuse comes to the attention of those who can help.⁴ As a result, the true scale of the issue is significantly higher, with many cases remaining hidden within private daily and caregiving relationships.

Coercive Control in Caregiving

Older Canadians are at a higher risk as they tend to rely on others for support with daily living, particularly where there are health challenges, mobility limitations, or cognitive decline. While most caregiving relationships are supportive, the inherent power imbalance where older adults depend on others for care, housing, or support makes them particularly vulnerable to coercive control.

Control may be framed as protective, but in practice, it can limit autonomy, restrict independence, and isolate individuals from their support networks. Over time, this can mirror the same patterns of coercive control recognized in intimate partner violence. Other jurisdictions, such as England and Wales, Ireland, Queensland and New South Wales in Australia, are increasingly recognizing that coercive control can occur in family and caregiving relationships, not only between intimate partners.

¹ Ha, L. (2024, May 13). *Brief overview of coercive control and the Criminal Law*. Government of Canada, Department of Justice, Electronic Communications.

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rd17-rr17/p4.html>

² Statistics Canada, The Daily, “Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2024” (28 October 2025) at paras 83–87 online:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/251028/dq251028a-eng.htm>.

³ Statistics Canada, “Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence, 2024” (28 October 2025) at paras 83-87, online:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/251028/dq251028a-eng.htm>.

⁴ Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada. (2025, February 17). *Elder Abuse*. Canada.ca.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/aging-seniors/elder-abuse.html>

Why the Bill Needs to Change

As currently drafted, Bill C-16 proposes to criminalize coercive control when it is committed by an intimate partner. This is welcome, but it leaves many older adults without protection when the abuse is perpetrated by relatives, informal caregivers, or others in a position of trust and dependence. Abusive coercion of older adults often occurs within relationships of trust, dependence, and proximity. These are not limited to intimate partners.

In these relationships, coercive control is typically not a single act, but a pattern of behavior that develops over time. These tactics may include:

- withholding or controlling access to money,
- isolating the individual from family, friends, or community supports,
- denying access to transportation, mobility aids, or communication tools,
- interfering with healthcare or decision-making, and/or
- using threats, intimidation, or manipulation.

These types of conduct can gradually erode autonomy, independence, and decision-making, often creating fear and dependency. Criminalizing coercive control is intended to allow early intervention before patterns of domination escalate into severe abuse. This need for early protection is just as important for older adults who experience coercive control from relatives or informal caregivers.

By limiting the offence to intimate partners, the current framework creates an unintended gap. Older adults who experience coercive control from a spouse would be protected under the proposed bill, while those experiencing similar conduct by a child, relative, or caregiver would not. This distinction risks creating unequal protection under the law based solely on the relationship between the victim and the abuser. Bill C-16 presents the opportunity to maximize the protections for vulnerable Canadians, but including focused protections for seniors.

Recommendation

CARP recommends that Bill C-16 be amended to expand the scope of the coercive control offence to include:

- 1) Current or former intimate partners
- 2) Relatives

- 3) Informal caregivers (defined as those having an informal care relationship, whether paid or unpaid, other than those covered by regulated professional services).

Conclusion

Bill C-16 is an important step toward recognizing coercive control as a serious form of abuse. However, to be effective, it must reflect the full range of relationships in which this behaviour occurs. For older Canadians, the risk of coercive control often lies outside of intimate partnerships. Limiting the scope of the offence risks excluding those who are most vulnerable. CARP urges the Committee to amend Bill C-16 to ensure that all individuals experiencing coercive and controlling behavior, regardless of relationships, are equally protected under the law.

Respectfully submitted by:

Anthony Quinn
President
The Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP)
a.quinn@carp.ca

Stella Song
Policy and Research Analyst
The Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP)
s.song@carp.ca

About CARP

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