



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill:
Men's Advisory Project

11 June 2020

Assembly was restored, we appreciated your exhortation that the Bill be brought to the Assembly. MAP commends everyone for their hard work and the thought involved and welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Bill.

We were glad to hear Minister Long say that it is important to recognise that anyone can be a victim and that abuse itself can take many forms. That is important because it is the first time that there has been a recognition of the width and breadth of abuse and of those who suffer. We highlight, again, that domestic abuse can be inflicted on anyone and by anyone, regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, education, race, colour, age, nationality or disability. We ask for equal protection for all victims and survivors under the law. We applaud the Assembly and Ministers for ensuring that the Bill remain gender-neutral in its language.

It was important for us to put some statistics in our response. Many people are surprised by how many victims of domestic abuse are male. In our response, we included some statistics that are quite easily gained, but we also wanted to show you, in tandem, some statistics from the PSNI and the Northern Ireland crime survey to give a more accurate overview of the amount of domestic abuse going on in society.

We begin by showing that there are five male victims of domestic abuse per 1,000 of the male population. Thirty-two men have lost their lives to domestic homicide in Northern Ireland, and that is 41% of all the domestic homicides in Northern Ireland. Thirty-five per cent of domestic abuse faced by men is inter-familial and is not from a partner or ex-partner. The police in Northern Ireland were made aware of only just over a third of the worst types of domestic partner abuse, according to the Northern Ireland crime survey, meaning that they were unaware of the experiences of six in 10 victims. Statistically, it is clear that many men face extensive domestic abuse, but I think that MAP's point of view is that, if we now widen our lens in how we view domestic abuse and are better able to assess domestic abuse, include all men and offer adequately funded services, those statistics would increase.

There has, of course, been a lot of very great suffering of many women who are also victims of domestic violence, and any proposed legislation should support and protect all victims. However, as this is the response from the only specialist agency supporting male victims, we will, for the majority, focus on men in our replies.

I think that, from this point, we are happy to speak to you regarding the clauses and any answers that you might want. Are you happy with that as a preamble?

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Yes. Thank you very much, Rhonda. That has given us a good overview. Obviously, members will have read your submission. There are a few questions, which I will start with. Hopefully, you can elaborate in response to them. Let me take you through some of them in an order based on the Bill.

I was interested in what you said about clause 2. Spiritual abuse was mentioned. Can you provide a bit of context to the concerns around the spiritual abuse aspect of this?

Ms Lusty: This might be something that people overlook, but, in fact, we see a fair amount of this. People who are in coercive or controlling and abusive relationships might enter into that relationship as part of a mixed marriage or with someone who is strongly of one religion when they themselves hold no real religion. Through the course of that relationship, they either have their spirituality and religion eradicated or they are forced into someone else's religion. Additionally, we see that, where there is a child and the child is a victim, quite often, the child will be used as part of the spiritual abuse. It might be that two parents have decided that the children will be brought up within one religion and, upon separation, the resident parent decides that that will no longer be the case and the child is moved to a different school or religion. It might be that they decide that the children will be brought up with no religion and in an integrated school life and things like that, and, conversely, they will be pushed into a religion upon separation. We have seen men who have been quite affected by spiritual abuse, and, additionally, we see gay, bi and trans men who have been abused through spiritual abuse through focus on outing them. Some gay, bi and trans men have very rich lives in the church but are not out, and we sometimes see that they are threatened and abused through threats to out them to their church community and destroy that link to their spiritual life.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you.

Ms Lusty: Does that make sense?

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Yes, and, in considering all that, I am trying to think about where, on that issue and others, you end up with the child, for example, being engaged in a tug of war and so on. What rights then does the child have to influence those types of decisions, and how can you frame legislation around that aspect of it?

Ms Lusty: It is an interesting point of view, but it also interesting when we consider how difficult it still is for us to speak about religion in our society. Often, we see gentle human beings being pushed and coerced out of something that enriches them spiritually. That can cause great distress and anxiety to them and to the wider family.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I will just move on to another ground that you have mentioned. Let me just find it. With regard to clause 14, "Penalty for the offence", in your submission there is a requirement for the police to implement the child contact orders. Can you elaborate on that aspect?

Ms Lusty: Currently, what happens is that a lot of men believe that the golden ticket is when they receive a child contact order. The difficulty is that very many child contact orders are not adhered to. We are not talking about situations where contact is being withheld because the parent is dangerous or presents a fear to the child. We are speaking on behalf of men who have been abused or have faced a long period of coercive or abusive behaviour. We must frame it in that way to begin with. We see the withholding of children and ignoring of child contact arrangements a lot, and the police, when asked to enact these orders, are really reticent to do so. The police say that they see it as a civil matter, even though it is a court order, that they do not want to cause more harm by taking children from one place to another and that they hope that the parents will do a better job. What we see instead is court orders being ignored and ignored, and then the only option is to move to the criminal courts for contempt of court. At that point, it is pushed from the criminal court straight back down to the family court, and it is a circular process.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Is that more of an issue in that having the police delivering those things might give a greater sense of the seriousness around it? Is it more appropriate to look at a stiffer approach in the courts system to non-compliance with court orders? The process or mechanism for delivery can be looked at, but is the focus not more about the court and the offence for not complying, rather than who delivers it?

Ms Lusty: It is an interesting *[Inaudible]* of course if you have spent years, and thousands of pounds, trying to ensure that you have reasonable and decent contact with your children, and you believe that you have the protection of the courts, yet court orders are constantly being frustrated and no one protects the implementation of them or works to implement them. It has to be either something that is the function of the court or something that we can do in tandem with the PSNI.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): You made some comments around clause 26 on the proceedings of cross-examination. Can you elaborate a little bit on that? It was under the prohibition of cross-examination in person. One of the comments in your submission was about getting legal representation where there is a view that people are knowingly accused in the wrong by their complainant, and then getting representation for parity of arms around representation. Do you want to comment on that and any other aspect of clause 26?

Ms Lusty: The first thing that I would like to say is that we wholeheartedly agree with the idea of special measures and protection for those who have to give evidence for domestic abuse or coercive control. We absolutely see that there must be a right to protection for those people who have suffered abuse. Our difficulty comes where there is not an equality of arms between the complainant and the accused. In those situations, we would like to see legal representation given to whomever is having to respond — generally, the man. As it currently works, legal aid is often not available in these situations, and that is what has caused these terrible difficulties. In prior times, of course, legal aid would have been made available to both of the parties, and there would not have been a situation where someone who was accused of domestic abuse might be directly questioning a complainant of domestic abuse. We just have to make sure that, in this situation, there is a fairness and equality for both, and to ensure that the court is able to do its job sufficiently.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): This is the last one for me. I am interested in the recommendation for a specialist domestic abuse court. Do you want to elaborate on why you feel that that is necessary?

Ms Lusty: I am just trying to find it in my pack.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): It is not mentioned in the legislation, but it was one of the areas where MAP had highlighted a gap and suggested that a specific specialist court around domestic abuse would be something —.

Ms Lusty: Yes. First, we had seen what was happening in Foyle and some of the very good moves that were happening under Judge McElholm and under the protection that was offered up in Derry/Londonderry. We had wanted to see that this was somewhere where family and criminal courts could speak to each other and be aware of the things that were happening. We would see, for instance, the extensive use of harassment that was happening in the criminal courts and then, in tandem, abuse happening in the family courts, or cases moving forward in the family courts, and neither of the courts were speaking to each other. This was in association with court orders being ignored and moved to criminal and then back to family, so we felt that it would be more appropriate that we start to move away from that piecemeal answer towards a specialist domestic court.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): It is definitely one that I am interested in. Whether or not we can legislate for how the courts structure themselves, I am not sure, but it may be something that we are able to look at. Thank you for that.

I want to bring in members now, Rhonda, if that is OK with you.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Rhonda, for your attendance and for your statement, questions and answers. I will take you to clause 5, Rhonda, the family connections clause. Let me just flip through my pages to get to it. You highlighted a concern in your paper about making sure that every family *[Inaudible]* is gained. You talked about foster *[Inaudible.]* What specific wording do you think needs to be applied to clause 5 in order to encapsulate every scenario?

Ms Lusty: We think that, by and large, this is an excellent Bill, but we think that there are some areas where you could do with tweaking it. Look at something like personal connection. We were really pleased to see that "affinity" covered many of the relationships where a person could have a position of influence over another person. However, one of the areas that we saw was missing was people who are involved in kinship care or foster care and families that are not set up in the typical way. Foster carers, for example, may be long-term foster carers, and whilst that child may not become an adopted child within that family, that is not to say that that relationship is not similar to personal connection or affinity and should not be covered.

You asked me about how it is worded, and that is difficult. I understand that Bills are drafted in a way to try to make them as wide as possible. However, in situations where we speak definitely about, "These are the things", we have seen where things fall outside it and are left in limbo. We often see difficulties in kinship and foster care, so we thought that it was important to bring that up in front of the Committee.

Mr Frew: OK. I asked a question in the last session and we talked about the possibility of a stalking clause to cover, as much as possible, victims of stalking before we have a stalking Bill before us; of course, there is a danger that we might not get to a stalking Bill in this term. What are your thoughts on adding a stalking offence to this Bill? How do we connect to this victims of stalking who are not captured in the definitions of a personal connection?

Ms Lusty: The difficulty with stalking, of course, is that it does not only involve people who are within an affinity. Stalking also involves many people with whom there is no relationship; they are someone who has been seen on the street, who they worked with or who they met on the bus. My understanding was that to add stalking to this Bill would be inappropriate because it would apply to relationships which are personal and involve an affinity, which are covered in the Bill, but it would also have to include all of the public. We were very grateful to see the work that was done by the Department of Justice whilst the Assembly was not able to work. We are also very grateful that the Justice Minister has spoken about her intent to take forward stalking legislation in addition to this legislation. We think that that is the right way to go. The full range of stalking and the serious and dramatic impact that it has on people needs to be properly worked out and consulted on. Both the personal and intimate side of stalking and the public and much more random side must be shown. Both are dangerous and both can end in death. We must adequately address both sides of stalking and harassment.

Mr Frew: I want to ask about clause 9. A lot of people, particularly men, have a real fear around the residency of children. You quoted a figure that 97% of residency of children goes to the mother or the

female in a relationship. What are your thoughts on that, further to your presentation? How do you think that can be addressed? Obviously, it is bound to be a massive hindrance to people who are victims of domestic violence leaving the environment where they are being abused. For fear even of the child being abused, they would stick in that environment to protect the child. What are your thoughts on all that?

Ms Lusty: We support clause 5 and for the aggravation to exist where a child becomes involved but is not the intended primary recipient of the abuse. MAP does not and has never accepted that children passively witness abuse. We see them as victims in their own right, but their being victims in their own right is multilayered and can unfortunately include when they are used as pawns or leverage to further control parents. Sometimes the children are not aware that it is going on, but sometimes they are manipulated in a way that means that it can be looked at only as abuse of children, because it puts immense pressure on the children. We see and hear from many men who have faced the most terrible forms of abuse and have to face it in front of the children where the children hear, witness and are horribly affected by it. It means that they often feel that there is no option other than to comply with the wishes of their abuser, and, to reduce the greater effect of harm on the children, they will leave.

There has to be recognition that children can be used to abuse via the emotions and respect and love of the parents, because we see many men remain in coercive, controlling and domestically abusive relationships simply because of the threat of never seeing their children again or the fear of how abuse will be enacted on those children if they are forced to leave the home. Often, we hear of men being told, "You will never see your kids again", and, unfortunately, we see that happen quite often.

When we speak about 97% of residency being granted to women, we are talking about those many cases where people are perfectly happy with the situation. We are not speaking about the happy situations, however; we are speaking about situations where there is domestic abuse and those situations where there is no reason why children should not be with both parents and those parents should *[Inaudible]* but more about where there is a manipulation and a further abuse of the man via withholding the child and destroying that relationship. We are thinking about that kind of knowing abuse and how we attend to and pay attention to it.

Mr Frew: Yes. I suppose it is not even about the residency, if that is the right word, being awarded to the woman; it is about breaking access arrangements when games can be played if children are dropped off in different places and arrangements change at the last minute that then makes it very difficult for the partner other than the mother to get to the child in time, which disrupts all sorts of plans for a weekend or a night's stay. Is that prevalent and something that you see daily in your organisation from complainants?

Ms Lusty: We see it all the time. Quite often, what we see is a father getting into a pattern of access maybe one night midweek, plus every other weekend. That seems to be a quite typical pattern, but in the one night midweek you will very often find that children will suddenly have lots of activities to do in that night. Children who have never gone to gymnastics in their life or GB or whatever will suddenly be doing those things on that night. The time that they should be spending with their father and that their father has long looked forward to is suddenly eaten up with lots of things, and, in fact, all they get is 10 minutes before bedtime. Then, over time, children are encouraged to think that perhaps it would be easier if they did not go. So, it is not always simply about the terrible things; it can be about people not being able to hold their adult feelings in.

How we address how the parental bond is encouraged *[Inaudible]* is sacred, almost, so that separated parents do not speak badly of each other. They still use the word "dad". They still encourage children to go and do not put blocks or barriers in the way. Certainly, the idea is not that they create a situation in which, eventually, the child has no contact with the parent or, by abusive orders, in which the father does not see the child for such a long time that it is incredibly difficult to re-establish a pattern of a father/child relationship.

Mr Frew: I have a few other short questions. You talk about making sure that, even for a generic crime where there is evidence of domestic violence, that should also be in clause 22 under the special measures directions. Have you thought about how that would be worded and how it could be encapsulated?

My final point is on parents. The abusive partner may use the courts in a way that dwindles the other's finances by getting them into court quite often, so the abuser is able to accept legal aid but the victim is not and then that dwindles away their financial resources and wealth.

Ms Lusty: I am sorry; I did not get the first part of your question.

Mr Frew: The first question was on special measures in court. There are a lot of caveats, clauses and subclauses there that allow you to go into special measures. You have it in your submission that, even if it is a generic crime to be investigated and that may go through the courts, if there is evidence of domestic violence, that can also be picked up under special measures directions.

Ms Lusty: In order for us to have any understanding that justice needs to be seen to be done, if a person is vulnerable or if there is a suggestion that a person is vulnerable, special measures should be provided. That is for a mother, a father, a child or anyone else in the vicinity of that situation.

What was the second part of your question?

Mr Frew: It was about dwindling resources and using the court as a weapon to remove wealth from the victim.

Ms Lusty: In different research, it would be called abuse of legal process. Often, one parent will have legal aid and the other parent will not, and one parent will be back and forward to court endlessly, and, eventually, what happens is that one parent will simply be unable to afford it and to carry on. It has such a detrimental effect on their mental health and creates the feeling that it will never end in any circumstances. Sometimes, it is really hard for them to see how to move forward. We have seen very many men become suicidal through the really terrible effects on their mental health post this happening. That is not in all cases or even in many, but we see it in a significant number. It is fair to say that a court that was able to see this as a wider issue might be able to better direct what was happening. On occasion, we see people who have spent £40,000 trying to have contact with their child. The parent has never been accused of domestic or sexual abuse or anything that would make you frightened of the child being with them. However, the abuse of orders and the constant back and forward to the court mean that they will not have seen their child for years.

Miss Woods: A number of my questions have been answered, but I would like to ask some generic ones, Rhonda. Your submission mentions the domestic abuse and coercive control that is conducted online or on digital platforms. Does that come up a lot in MAP? Is it sufficiently covered in this legislation or is a wee bit more needed?

Ms Lusty: Thank you for the question, Rachel. We see a fair bit of it. As we move forward as a society, we see that, increasingly, people use digital platforms and methods of communications to be abusive towards each other. Some abuses are obvious, such as text and WhatsApp messages. However, we have seen Facebook campaigns and other terrible abusive situations that have been set up. We have seen a lot of abuse via social media. Sometimes, we see really extreme cases of abuse via Facebook accounts, social media accounts and that sort of thing. We were heartened to see it in the Bill, if I am honest.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): You were heartened to see what in the Bill, sorry?

Ms Lusty: We were heartened to see the inclusion of online communication in the Bill.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): You would like to see that included. OK.

Miss Woods: Other submissions brought up the creation of a domestic abuse commissioner, a similar scrutiny body or a critical friend. Would you support that?

Ms Lusty: It is hard for me to fully support the idea of a commissioner. I took seriously what the Minister said about the cost. I thought that having a champion might be useful, someone who is a better conduit between government and the other sectors, and who is able to try to get the better and best working. I would be happier to see a champion than a commissioner. However, we are certainly not against that idea, and I am be happy to be involved in further conversation. Given the lack of funding available, I would want to see what were the benefits of a commissioner versus, say, a champion.

Miss Woods: OK, thank you. Strangulation came up in your submission as well. Would you like to see that covered in separate legislation or included in this Bill, perhaps in clause 2?

Ms Lusty: We looked at it as separate legislation to be brought out afterwards, in the same way as we imagine stalking legislation. We see in that way because we want to try to bring forward this Bill and have people understand coercive control and the training that is necessary to recognise it, not only for first responders but for wider society. Trying to include strangulation as well would add too many elements to the Bill, when it is vital that we understand the issue. It is vital that it has a campaign in its own right.

Ms Dillon: Thank you, Rhonda, for your presentation. Quite a bit of what I wanted to cover has been covered already by the Chair, Rachel and your brief, for which we are grateful. Thank you for the manner in which you wrote your submission; by going through each clause. That is very helpful.

I have a few brief questions. With regard to clause 8, you raise the issue of the victim being under 18 years of age and the perpetrator being over 18 years of age, and you voice a wee bit of concern about when there are only a couple of months between them. Will you clarify whether your concern is that the perpetrator would be treated as though the younger person were 16 years old or that you want the perpetrator to be treated as though the age gap were bigger?

Ms Lusty: We were just trying to highlight that, in those situations, sometimes, there has to be nuance. In a relationship between someone who is 18 and a half years old and someone who is 17 and a half years old, the person who is 18 and a half years old is hit with an aggravator label and prosecuted in a way that another person would not be. There needs to be nuance to ensure that this is done in a thoughtful way.

Ms Dillon: You think that it should be nuanced so that, for example, if the perpetrator is 18 years and two months old and the victim is 17 years and nine months old, that is treated very differently from a situation in which the victim is 15 or 16 years old and the perpetrator is 25 years old.

Ms Lusty: Yes, I do, because youth is, of course, a vulnerability. It is interesting to think that youth is considered a vulnerability only up and until the age of 17 years and 364 days.

Ms Dillon: Yes.

Ms Lusty: We have to be sensible. When we look at the Bill as it sits, we could be very fearful about how many of its elements might work. When we started to use it, we would, quite soon, see the issues that created problems and those that did not. For instance, I hope that when the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) looked at such a case, they would use good judgement. However, it is still an issue to highlight in our submission because it is an area that we must consider as nuanced.

Ms Dillon: OK. Thank you, Rhonda. You highlight your concerns about clause 12. Concerns were also highlighted by Women's Aid in the previous session. Do you think that it should be removed, or is it just that its exact meaning needs to be tightened or tidied up? Which would be your preference?

Ms Lusty: My preference would be to look for a tweak to clause 12. We appreciate the rationale for it, we really do. Without the clause being in there, the necessary safeguards for those who need them will not be there. Northern Ireland is a place where there is healthy and robust scrutiny of decisions through obtaining leave for judicial review. Without the reasonableness defence, the reputational integrity of the legislation may be tarnished. There should always be the burden to prove the reliance on the defence, and the defence should never be accepted in instances in which there would be any fear or physical harm caused. We would hope that, when they are called to any offence, the police are able to see quite clearly whether it is a course of action or a one-off. We would hope that they are able to use their very good sense. If they were then to feel that a case should go to the PPS, the same thing. We have a series of checks and balances here, but we also need to be able to have a reasonableness defence, in order to allow people to protect relatives, say, with dementia, or those who are vulnerable, in the proper sense, and need to be safeguarded.

Ms Dillon: OK. Thank you. When discussing clause 14, you raised the fact that there are no perpetrator programmes for females and that there is a lack of such programmes through the courts. We know that there has been a very poor uptake of the perpetrator programmes that there are for males. For want of a better word, is a forced programme the answer? In cases in which there are diversionary programmes for young people, those are mostly voluntary. If a programme is not voluntary, there is a feeling among young people that they are being made to do it. They are therefore doing it because it is voluntary. They are not really interested in trying to right the wrong, or they do

not believe that they have even done wrong. Is it not the case that the voluntary route is the better way to go, particularly for this type of crime? If people do not believe that they have done wrong, it is difficult to put them on to a programme to help them to learn to do right.

Ms Lusty: You make some really good points. I welcome the question. There was very poor take-up of Judge McElholm's mandated course, because there was a knowing use of "Take this course, or take your chances in court", with the hope that pressure would be placed on victims to withdraw their statement, therefore lessening the chances of conviction.

Those courses can often be attached to domestic abuse protection orders (DAPOs), whenever those are brought through. DAPOs can have other powers. For example, people can be encouraged to take part in a course to stop using substances or to get help for other issues that they might be suffering from that are exacerbating their use of frightening or abusive behaviours. If there were more opportunities for behavioural change programmes, with access to them available for younger people from the age of 14 upwards, and if those courses were both mandated and non-mandated, were not seen as a stigma and were something that we could positively encourage, there could be a huge change.

Ms Dillon: Thank you, Rhonda. I appreciate your answer. Finally, the Chair's question about a special domestic abuse court and your response were very interesting. You are probably right, in that when you are operating in a vacuum, with the family court not knowing what is happening in the criminal court, you are perhaps not getting the right outcome very often. You could have a very different outcome in many of the cases that come before the family court if judges there were aware of what was going on in the criminal court. That would be interesting to look at, and it is a good point, which the Chair picked up on.

Ms Lusty: Thank you for that.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Sinéad Bradley is on the line.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Rhonda. *[Inaudible]* second-last paragraph, you referred to the courts having an understanding of or connection with what is happening. Earlier, *[Inaudible]* talked about having access to *[Inaudible]* and there are circumstances *[Inaudible]* unchallenged and received a caution. I have no doubt that that must paint a picture *[Inaudible.]* Another point *[Inaudible]* elaborate *[Inaudible]* apologies, because I could not hear it very well, in the final paragraph *[Inaudible]* very clearly points out that *[Inaudible]* the problem that *[Inaudible]* basically *[Inaudible]* for somebody who has *[Inaudible]* made and that, correctly in her case, to surround immediately the alleged victim at that point. That then could be made into a fact rather than something that has to be examined. You highlighted that very well —.

Ms Lusty: I am so sorry. I have to say that I cannot hear you. I am really sorry to have to say so.

Ms S Bradley: No. That is fine. Apologies. I can pick up the points with you again. I know that the situation is not ideal.

Ms Lusty: I am so sorry, but if anyone else is able —.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Apologies, Rhonda. Apologies, Sinéad, as well. We are just not quite picking up all of the conversation.

Ms S Bradley: OK, Chair.

Ms Lusty: I am so sorry.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): You are OK. It is the nature of the technology. Doug Beattie, are you on the line?

Mr Beattie: Yes. You asked my question about court orders, Chair, so I do not have any questions. I just want to thank Rhonda for an incredibly good and informative presentation and for her answering of the questions, which really has been good. Thank you very much indeed, Rhonda.

Ms Lusty: Thank you, Doug.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you, Doug. Jemma?

Ms Dolan: *[Inaudible.]* I just want to thank Rhonda *[Inaudible.]*

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. Thank you, Jemma.

Rhonda, I thank you very much for presenting to the Committee and for the detailed way in which you have been able to answer our questions. It has certainly been informative for members. If there are any other issues on which we want to follow up with you once we have taken other evidence and reached considered views, I am sure that you will be more than happy to engage with us if we need to write to you.

Ms Lusty: I am sure that mention was made earlier of gay, bi and trans men. I did not get to hear Sonya's evidence, but we felt that it would be wrong of us to leave without speaking to the Justice Committee about that. Are you happy for me to speak a little bit about that, or must you get on?

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): On what issue, sorry?

Ms Lusty: Issues that particularly affect gay, bi and trans men.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): In the legislation?

Ms Lusty: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): We need to vacate the room in about 10 minutes, so if you want to make a comment, please make it very briefly. We will then have it on the record.

Ms Lusty: That is fine. About 11% of the men who come to us are gay, bi or trans. There are multiple circumstances in which domestic abuse occurs. When it occurs with gay, bi and trans men, they might not be supported in the same way in which someone in a heterosexual or heteronormative relationship would be supported. Quite often, it might be assumed that it is a fight or that things will be OK.

We want to highlight the fact that these things flow through all relationships. When we talk about domestic abuse, we ask that each Committee involved widens its lens. That does not suggest that we ask that you widen the lens for just men but that you pay specific attention to what happens to gay, bi and trans men as well. They can experience unique forms of coercive control. We see them being controlled through their sexual orientation, HIV status, religious practice or even gender identity. We really want to make sure that, when we do a big educational and advertisement piece on the Bill, we reference not only men but especially gay, bi and trans men.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. Thank you. We have that in the written submission. I think that you elaborate on that and other aspects, so be assured that the evidence that we have received in writing will be considered by the Committee in addition to your oral comments. I appreciate that.

Thank you very much, Rhonda.

Ms Lusty: Thank you for asking us to the Committee today.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Not at all. It was a pleasure. Thank you. Take care. Bye-bye.

Ms Lusty: Bye.