MEDIA RELEASE

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New coalition calls for immediate action on criminalising coercive control

Today, in a game changer for Australian women, Women’s Safety NSW have joined a powerful coalition to call for state and federal governments to criminalise coercive control.

Standing with advocates across the sector including White Ribbon, Small Steps 4 Hannah, Queensland Women’s Legal Service, Women’s Community Shelters and Doctors Against Toward Women, author of ‘Look What You Made Me Do’ Jess Hill and Are Media, we have launched a criminalise coercive control campaign.

‘Criminalising coercive control alongside system reforms to our civil and criminal justice system will mean victims of domestic and family violence will have greater access to protection and justice – and that a very clear message is sent to everyone in the community that coercive controlling behaviour is dangerous and intolerable’ says Women’s Safety NSW CEO, Hayley Foster.

The criminalisation of coercive control legitimises the foundational element of domestic abuse that consists of deliberate tactics that include psychological and other forms of abuse such as manipulation and surveillance, intimidation, isolation that perpetrators use to dominate their victims that is yet to be made illegal in NSW.
'Standing here today I wish we had been here 5 years ago - that is because I believe we are at the crux for having coercive control passed in this country.’ says Nithya Reddy who lost her sister Preethi in March last year when she was murdered by her ex-partner following a relationship characterised by coercive control.

Nithya further stated ‘we know that coercive control is a common factor in 99% of domestic homicide in NSW with victims who are female…that is because coercive control forms the basis….it is at its core. [domestic abuse] is not an isolated incident, and that is how we need to understand domestic violence in this country – and that is what every politician and person needs to know.’

Brad Chilcott, Executive Director of White Ribbon Australia, shared findings from a national poll of more than 1,000 Australians conducted by White Ribbon Australia that powerfully indicate that ‘70% of Australians believe coercive control should be a crime… Australians want perpetrators held to account’.

The criminalisation of control is an essential step to reframe our understanding of what constitutes domestic abuse as Jess Hill, author of ‘Look What You Made Me Do’, expressed: ‘Criminalising coercive control will replace the broken lens we have on domestic abuse: instead of seeing a collection of incidents, it will make visible the system of abuse that endangers- and even skills- so many women and children’.

The group is calling on State and Territory governments to take immediate action on criminalising coercive control. Specifically to:

- Commit to criminalising coercive control by July 2021;
● Put in place a consultation period, particularly with organisations on the front line and domestic and family violence survivors, to provide input into how the new law would operate; and
● Guarantee the necessary resources and reform framework to ensure the judiciary and the police are equipped and trained to effectively enforce the law as intended.

Women’s Safety NSW’s position on coercive control is further explained in their Criminalising Coercive Control position paper.

The campaign has launched a petition today for Australians to demonstrate support in the criminalisation of coercive control.

About:

Women’s Safety NSW is a peak representative body for women’s specialist domestic and family violence services. Our purpose is to advocate on behalf of our members for women’s safety, justice and wellbeing in the context of domestic and family violence through policy, practice, law reform and cultural change.

Our full members – Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service workers – supported 51,383 women across NSW last year through:

● NSW’s integrated response to domestic and family violence, Safer Pathway, in 43 metropolitan, regional and rural locations;
● The Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program in 117 local courts across the state; and
● The Family Advocacy Support Service in Family Law Registries.
Our associate members are women’s specialist domestic violence workers working in a variety of services including staying home leaving violence, women’s health, women’s supported accommodation, women’s counselling, and women’s legal services.

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Frontline domestic and family violence specialist workers and survivors of domestic and family violence are also available for comment on request.