
Testimony in Support of S2489 Senate Judiciary Committee

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To Senate Judiciary Committee <SenateJudiciary@rilegislature.onmicrosoft.com>

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Good evening Chairman Felag and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Deborah Cooper, and I am a Rhode Island resident writing in support of S2489, which recognizes coercive control as a form of domestic abuse.

For many survivors, abuse does not begin with physical violence. It begins with patterns of manipulation, intimidation, isolation, and psychological domination that gradually erode a person's autonomy and sense of safety. These behaviors can include sustained verbal degradation, retaliation for questioning a partner's behavior, deception that interferes with a person's ability to make informed decisions about their own wellbeing, and emotional tactics designed to silence or control.

Because these patterns are often psychological rather than physical, survivors are frequently told that "nothing illegal has happened" until the situation escalates to violence. By that point, the harm has already been done.

Recognizing coercive control in Rhode Island law helps address this gap. It allows courts and law enforcement to evaluate abusive behavior as a pattern of control, rather than isolated incidents that are viewed individually and dismissed. This recognition can help validate survivor experiences, allow earlier intervention, and potentially prevent escalation to more severe forms of abuse.

Domestic abuse is not always visible. Often it is a sustained campaign of control that slowly removes a person's freedom to question, to set boundaries, or to leave safely. Laws that acknowledge these patterns help bring that reality into the legal framework where it belongs.

I appreciate the committee's consideration of this legislation and the effort to better recognize the full spectrum of domestic abuse.

Thank you for your time and for your work on this issue.

Respectfully,

Deborah A. Cooper

Sent from my iPhone