



Legislation Summary:

An Act improving protections relative to domestic violence

Bill number: H1547/S1077

Chief Sponsors: Representatives Natalie Higgins and Tram Nguyen and Senator Michael Moore

What the bill does, why LWVMA supports or opposes it, and the League position relative to this bill.

The bill would expand the definition of domestic violence to include controlling and coercive patterns of abuse reflecting a greater understanding of what is domestic violence.

State laws to capture the full range of behavior that constitutes domestic abuse. Current domestic violence law does not adequately recognize forms of abuse other than physical abuse. The current law specifies physical violence or the imminent threat of physical violence. It does not consider the totality of the prior abuse history, such as intimidation and entrapment.

These bills define coercive control as “a pattern of threatening, humiliating, or intimidating actions ... designed to make an individual dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence, and regulating their everyday behavior.”

- Using economic abuse to limit access to resources
- Isolating from friends and family
- Threatening to report a parent to DCF (filing a report with the Department of Children and Families alleging abuse and neglect).
- Threatening to report person to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement)
- Using technology to monitor person
(behavior intended to harm, threaten, intimidate, control, stalk, harass, impersonate, or monitor another person ... that occurs via the Internet, social networking sites, computers, mobile devices, cellular telephones, apps, location tracking devices, instant messages, text messages, or other forms of technology)
- Sharing explicit images without permission
- Abusive litigation
- Displaying weapons
- Humiliation and degradation

One advocate explained, “Survivors report that the psychological control and manipulation is often the worst part of the abuse. Victims are made to feel afraid. Abusers deprive them of resources such as friends and money — so they feel trapped. Without laws that specifically mention coercive control, people who are being victimized — and we are mostly speaking about women — often cannot get protection... That kind of abuse is hard to see. It doesn’t leave bruises or broken bones.”

It is important to give it a name. Coercive control is really taking away the liberty of another person.

League position

The prevention of domestic violence. A strong statewide response to domestic violence that is integrated, interdisciplinary, and adequately funded, involving all segments of the criminal justice system, the medical community, the schools, social services, and the private sector, with a primary focus on the safety of victims. (*Where We Stand*, p.38)