



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
In Support of H1547/S1077 An Act improving protections relative to domestic violence
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 44 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, urges you to support H1547/S1077 An Act improving protections relative to domestic violence that updates the definition of domestic violence to include coercive control and technological abuse.

According to the US Department of Justice, domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. It is best understood as a broad spectrum of abusive behaviors of which physical violence is on the end of a spectrum of escalating behaviors designed to exert power and control over their partner. Abusers use coercive tactics to control their partners, isolate them from support, deprive them of independence, and exploit them. Some examples might be threatening to harm pets, monitoring text messages or emails, threatening to report a victim to immigration or child protection officials, discrediting the victim by feigning heightened concern about the victim's mental stability, preventing the victim from accessing financial resources, or isolating the victim and preventing them from fleeing.

These coercive tactics are part of an overall pattern of behaviors designed to exert control and force compliance. The impact of which is emotionally and often financially devastating for victims and their children.

Abusers can be very creative in the tactics they use to control their victims. Many times they use coded language or phrases to control their victim while in public places. For example: after relating in great detail a news story about a man who beat and drowned his wife on a fishing trip, an abuser would bring up a romantic bed and breakfast trip with great fishing nearby whenever he wanted to control or silence his victim. The victim associates a fishing trip with the threat of being beaten and possibly killed. While an outsider, a mediator or counselor, perceives the discussion about a fishing trip as cooperative and thoughtful, the target of the abuse believes it is a death threat. In 20% of domestic violence homicides, the first act of physical violence is murder. Reminding the victim that they could go "fishing" at any time was part of the coercive control.

Abusers will also use reproductive coercion by monitoring contraception compliance, preventing the use of contraception, or covertly substituting placebos for contraceptives. Reproductive coercion has the added consequence that children bind the victim more closely to the abuser, provide ongoing access to the victim, and the children become a tool of the abuser.

Abusers use the same playbook over and over again, trapping the victim in a pattern of escalating intimidation and subjugation. An abuser knows their victim's vulnerabilities better than anyone else and tailors the abuse to use those pain points to control and coerce.

Our policies and laws must acknowledge and provide protections for coercive tactics used by abusers to control their victims. Therefore, the League strongly urges you to support the passage and implementation of H1547/S1077 An Act improving protections relative to domestic violence and to report these bills favorably and in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration.