

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**29 August 2024**

### **Criminalising Coercive Control: Landmark Reforms Introduced to Parliament**

In a significant move toward addressing domestic and family violence, on 29 August 2024 the South Australian Government introduced landmark reforms to State Parliament, to criminalise coercive control.

Coercive control involves someone, usually a current or former partner, using abusive behaviours in a pattern over time to dominate and control another person. In heterosexual intimate partnerships, coercive control is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women. It causes significant fear, distress and harm to victim-survivors and it also a red flag that the person perpetrating abuse is at significantly heightened risk of killing the person they are abusing.

The Bill criminalises coercive behaviours within current and former intimate partner relationships that limit a person's:

- Freedom of movement or action
- Engagement in social, political, religious, cultural, educational or economic activities
- Ability to make decisions about their own body
- Access to the justice system, basic necessities, support services or property they own

To ensure the laws address genuine instances of coercive control, the prosecuti prove that the behaviour had a controlling impact likely to cause physical injury or psychological harm. Mary Leaker, General Manager of Embolden, welcomed the introduction of the Bill as a crucial step forward in addressing domestic and family violence in South Australia:

“The introduction to Parliament of a Bill to make coercive control a criminal offence is an important step for South Australia in addressing domestic and family violence and rectifies a critical gap between our criminal law and what victim-survivors often say is the worst part of their experience of abuse.”

Embolden supports the State Government's intention of a long lead-in time before the Act comes into force:

“It is vital that our police, courts, and services have the capacity and capability to respond effectively, to ensure that coercive control legislation has the intended benefits for victim-

survivors and to reduce the risk of unintended negative impacts. This includes the risk that the person most in need of protection will be misidentified – and research tells us that this is particularly a risk for Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse women.”

“We have work to do to ensure that people working in our systems understand the gendered dynamics of power within coercive and controlling relationships and the ways in which these operate to constrain women’s freedom of action. We have work to do to ensure that our processes, including risk assessments, are responsive to coercive control as a pattern of behaviour over time.

Embolden also recognises the introduction of coercive control legislation as a really important opportunity to strengthen the understanding of domestic violence and abuse across our broader community.

“With effective communication, coercive control laws will mean that more South Australians recognise the signs of coercive control and know how they might safely support family members, friends or colleagues who are experiencing, or using, coercive control.”

“Embolden looks forward to continuing to work alongside the State Government, the legal sector, and domestic and family violence services to ensure that South Australia is fully prepared for the implementation of this vital reform.”