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New Coalition Forms to Advance Legislation Aimed at Addressing Coercive Control and Domestic Abuse

Together Rising Above Coercion (TRAC) will advocate for legislation in Massachusetts to ensure stronger protections for victims and survivors

Boston, June 15 – Today, a group of survivors and organizations in Massachusetts committed to preventing domestic abuse launched Together Rising Above Coercion (TRAC), a coalition that will advocate for legislation to better address 'coercive control,' a pattern of deliberate behavior by an abuser that substantially restricts their victim's safety and autonomy.

Current law in Massachusetts (Chapter 209A) limits the definition of domestic abuse to physical abuse and coerced sexual relations, but many victims are also subject to other forms of persistent, harmful abuse and control, including intimidation, threats, isolation, technology abuse, and abusive litigation. TRAC is calling on Massachusetts lawmakers to support and pass two important pieces of legislation: An Act to Improve Protections Relative to Domestic Violence (H.1547/S.1077), which would expand domestic abuse protections to include various forms of coercive control, and An Act Relative to Controlling and Abusive Litigation (H.1399/S.1079), which would give courts and survivors more tools to prevent litigation aimed at control and intimidation.

"Thinking about domestic abuse only as physical violence limits our collective ability to respond and truly address the root causes of abuse," said Jamie Sabino, Deputy Director of Advocacy at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. "Coercive control – highly individualized efforts by abusers to confuse, undermine, isolate, and disempower their victims – including abusive litigation, is both widespread and dangerous. Victims of technology abuse, for example, are twice as likely to be physically abused, 2.5 times as likely to be psychologically abused, and five times as likely to be sexually coerced, according to research from the Urban Institute."

"Today's digital world, with yesterday's laws, make technology abuse that much easier for abusers," said Carmen Aliber of TRAC. "TRAC's goal is to bring greater awareness to these challenges and expand legal protections for victims and survivors."

"Chapter 209A reflects an outdated understanding of domestic abuse," said Hema Sarang-Sieminski, Deputy Director of Jane Doe Inc. "By passing An Act to Improve Protections Relative to Domestic Violence and An Act Relative to Controlling and Abusive Litigation, policymakers can ensure that state law takes a more nuanced, comprehensive view of the causes and impact of abuse, and that victims of coercive control and abusive litigation have legal recourse <u>before</u> their lives are endangered. We are grateful to Representative Natalie Higgins, Representative Tram Nguyen, Representative Natalie Blais, Senator Michael Moore, and all the Representatives and Senators who have co-sponsored these important bills; we urge their colleagues to join them and prioritize passage of this legislation."

On Tuesday, June 20, TRAC will host a legislative briefing at the State House (Room 428) on the two bills, alongside the bills' sponsors and experts on coercive control.

About TRAC

Made up of individuals and organizations from across Massachusetts, TRAC seeks to expand protections for victims of domestic abuse and their children by securing additional laws and statutes in Massachusetts, including those targeting coercive control, which is the foundation for all forms of domestic abuse, and abusive litigation. We believe that laws must better protect those impacted by domestic abuse who are subjected to ongoing coercion, manipulation, intimidation, and threats.

Serving on the statewide steering committee are:

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI)
Jane Doe Inc. (JDI)
Worcester Community Connections Coalition
Shaquera's Story Domestic Violence Consulting and Coaching, Inc.
Mass Family Advocacy Coalition (MFAC)
Jane Does Well

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