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Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon



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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 46 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We will start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, June 23, 2022, the committee resumes consideration of Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments regarding firearms.

We have two panels of witnesses today. For the first hour, we will have with us, by video conference, from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, Dr. Atul Kapur, emergency physician and co-chair of the public affairs committee; and in person here with us in the room, we have, for the Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights, Rod Giltaca, chief executive officer and executive director.

Welcome to you all. We will start by giving each group an opportunity to make a five-minute opening statement.

Dr. Kapur, please go ahead for five minutes, sir.

Dr. Atul Kapur (Emergency Physician and Co-Chair, Public Affairs Committee, Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening. Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee.

The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, of which I am proud to be a member, is at the forefront of treating patients and families with [Technical difficulty—Editor] traumatic injuries, including firearm injuries and death. As such, we have a unique perspective on how we can work to [Technical difficulty—Editor] trauma of such injuries and deaths.

As well, we are particularly aware that, despite a lot of publicity regarding homicides, three out of every four firearm deaths in Canada are suicides. We think that important element is often miss-

ing from the discussion and dialogue around firearm safety. That is one area that we would wish to focus on.

Where there are more firearms accessible, there is increased trauma. There are increased injuries—

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Pardon me, sir. We'll just pause.

[Translation]

I don't think interpretation is available.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: The interpreter is telling me that connectivity issues are preventing interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're going to suspend for a couple of minutes. We have some translation issues.

• (1830)

(Pause)

• (1835)

The Chair: Let's resume the meeting. I'll ask the doctor to carry on, and we'll make the best of it.

Dr. Kapur.

Dr. Atul Kapur: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will speak slower and more clearly.

As I said, we want to highlight that three out of every four firearm deaths in Canada are suicide rather than intentional homicide or accidents. In fact, Canada has one of the highest rates of suicide by firearms in the developed world.

There is strong and robust scientific evidence that having a gun in the home is associated with a higher risk of suicide. For every 10% decline in gun ownership, firearm suicide deaths dropped by 4.2% and overall suicide rates dropped by 2.5%. As well, availability of guns is associated with homicide and particularly with domestic violence homicides.

We also note that the vast majority of suicide deaths are impulsive. If you can reduce access to means with high lethality, people will not usually switch to other means, which is the so-called “substitution effect”. With means of lower lethality, there are more chances to intervene and prevent the suicide altogether.

With that, we wish to focus on the red flag law provisions of the bill in front of you. CAEP has, for many years, called for a mandatory reporting system and a red flag law in Canada. By that, we mean a medical reporting system of individuals at risk. However, we have concerns that, in its present form, the language in the bill will have very limited effectiveness.

This is principally because the law will require an application to a court to have firearms removed from a home or an individual's possession. We continue to maintain that this is far from the timely responsiveness that is required. We, as emergency physicians, must be able to report the incident or a patient at higher risk to the police directly in order to protect the individual and their friends and families. When minutes and hours count, taking days or weeks to act is indefensible.

This applies to patients who are at a high risk of suicidality, but do not reach the level of needing to be admitted to hospital. It also applies to patients with a history of dementia and impulsive behaviour, and particularly to patients whom we identify to be at risk of domestic or interpersonal violence.

Placing the onus on victims of interpersonal violence or on a family member of a depressed person or demented parent is largely unworkable and an unwelcome hindrance to getting the guns temporarily out of the homes of those in crisis.

● (1840)

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I believe there is a quorum call in the House of Commons. Is that possible?

The Chair: That is possible.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Can we verify that, and if so, ensure that—

The Chair: If that is the case, we will need unanimous consent to carry on. I'll ask the clerk to check into that.

Meanwhile, we'll let Dr. Kapur carry on with this statement. I'm sorry for the interruption once again.

An hon. member: I'd like to move to suspend.

The Chair: Okay, we'll suspend for a few minutes.

● (1840)

(Pause)

● (1840)

The Chair: Thank you all for bearing with us.

When the lights start going off in the room here, it means a vote, or that the House is adjourning or starting. In this case, it was a quorum call. Generally speaking, if there's a vote or something, we require unanimous consent to continue.

However, it seems as if the quorum call has been resolved and we can continue.

Once again, with apologies, Dr. Kapur, perhaps you could carry on with your statement.

Dr. Atul Kapur: Fortunately, or unfortunately, as an emergency physician, I am familiar with being interrupted.

To come back to the point regarding our concerns about the red flag law provisions currently in this bill, the requirement to go to court is a significant roadblock to the effectiveness of this part of the legislation. It would need to be combined, we feel, with the allowance for physicians, particularly emergency physicians, to report issues of concern of higher risk to police so that intervention could occur in a timely manner.

There is one example of a red flag law in Canada already and that's Anastasia's law in Quebec. It has also been rendered less effective because of the lack of resources that have been provided in order to support its use and to educate the public and physicians on how to use it appropriately. We would also call for adequate resources in terms of knowledge dissemination, education and the ability for proper response to occur once a situation has been reported.

Finally, as emergency physicians, we continue the call we've been making for many years for appropriate resources for research and data gathering, so that we can have more accurate information and scientific evidence on which to make further policy decisions.

I believe that was my five minutes, Chair. I appreciate the time.

● (1845)

The Chair: Thank you, Doctor.

We'll carry on now with Mr. Giltaca. Welcome.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Rod Giltaca (Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights): Members of the committee and Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to chat with you. I really appreciate it.

I guess we can just jump right into it.

Concerning Bill C-21, there are some provisions in this bill—or maybe the motivation behind them—that our group can support. The reason I say that is we want a safer Canada too. In fact, I might add that we share a lot of the same safety concerns as a lot of the individuals and groups that you've heard from in this committee so far as well.

For example, we support revoking the licence of those who are guilty of domestic violence or those who are subject to a protection order, granted that the order was proven and justified. That's really important because, obviously, we don't want innocent people being caught up in a new system like that. We support those kinds of things because they just make sense.

We obviously don't want the wrong people being able to legally buy guns—although, in my experience, that and a lot more already happen. Currently, anyone can contact the police at any time if they have a safety concern involving firearms. It's taken very seriously and the police have the legal ability to search and seize almost anything, depending on the level of concern they have for public safety. You've heard that before. You're not hearing that from me for the first time.

There are other provisions in the bill that, of course, are absurd. I think most people realize that already.

There's a new charge for modifying a cartridge magazine. It's already a very serious criminal offence to be in possession of a cartridge magazine that can contain more than the prescribed number of rounds. The possession offence is the only one you could ever really prove anyway, unless you caught someone with a prohibited cartridge magazine in one hand and a file or a drill bit in the other. Plus, you can 3-D print magazines. That provision really doesn't serve any practical public safety purpose.

Another example, unfortunately, is raising the maximum penalty for firearms trafficking from 10 to 14 years. I'm not aware of anyone—ever—who got 10 years for firearms trafficking. I don't know that, because I haven't been on CanLII for days on end, but I have just never heard of that. I have heard a lot to the contrary, and you guys have heard that as well from law enforcement professionals. That measure ends up being a little bit meaningless too.

When I look at those two measures it just says to me that these are opportunities for tough-on-crime talking points. I just don't think there's a place in legislation for that kind of stuff. It's a bit of a concern.

We're most concerned about the handgun ban. I understand the limitations of this committee process and why we're here. I will just offer a little bit of perspective and we can talk about the provision after that.

To say it simply, the handgun ban is unjustified. The committee heard some great information in this process and, obviously, some blatant misinformation. You've heard from numerous active duty law enforcement personnel that the ban on handguns of licensed individuals will have no meaningful benefit to public safety. Here's a quote from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police:

We believe that a handgun freeze is one method of reducing access to these types of firearms, while allowing existing law-abiding handgun owners to practice their sport.

That's fair enough. They continued:

However, we continue to maintain that restricting lawful handgun ownership will not meaningfully address the real issue....

They go on to talk about gangs and other criminal activity. That's right from the Association of Chiefs of Police.

You've heard numerous retired members of law enforcement say essentially the same thing. You've heard from an exceptional criminal defence lawyer that the handgun ban won't change the behaviour of criminals or the level of access they have to illegal firearms. You've heard from sport shooting organizations that the ban will hurt them in the short term and extinct them in the medium term.

You've heard from gun owners that their property will be taken from them for no fault of their own whatsoever, and that their identity and culture is repugnant and there's no place in Canada for them. I would suggest that law-abiding, licensed firearm owners are deserving of respect and they're just as entitled to their place in Canada as anyone else, as outrageous as that might sound.

For those who don't own guns, the nuclear option of gun bans sounds reasonable only because it's predicated on the idea that handgun ownership is some frivolous, self-centred and unnecessary hobby and that it ought to just be swept away, along with the 650,000 people that are licensed to own handguns in Canada.

I'll tell you, that does not align with reality at all. Therefore, I don't envy you for having to deal with a bill like this. I would ask that you explore other options to mitigate the illegal handgun problem—which we all can see very plainly—before supporting a ban that affects only those who comply with the law.

• (1850)

I appreciate your time and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We will start our questions with Mr. Lloyd, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to start with you, Dr. Kapur.

The studies that you just cited on suicide and homicide, can you tell us if those studies were done in the American or the Canadian context?

Dr. Atul Kapur: Most of those studies I believe were done in the American context. I believe there are some Canadian studies, but as I said in my opening comments, one of the things that we have repeatedly called for is the resources to research—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Yes, and I agree with you, we need that. We definitely do need better data and information on this. I would just hope that you can table those studies that you cited to this committee, because I asked for them from other witnesses previously and they didn't hand them in. I hope I can get a commitment that, if you have those studies available, you would table them with the committee so that we can review them at a later date.

Something I was a bit concerned about—and maybe this is an education opportunity—is that there's nothing stopping you as an emergency room doctor, or any doctor, from calling the police if you have a safety concern about somebody who owns firearms. Are you aware of that?

Dr. Atul Kapur: There is actually a restraint on me from reporting things that are held confidential due to the medical relationship, the doctor-patient relationship. However, there are specific areas where I am relieved of my duty of confidentiality, for example, in mandatory reporting of drivers where I have reason to believe someone has a condition that would make it dangerous for them to drive. For that there is specific legislation that relieves me of my confidentiality restrictions.

That doesn't necessarily apply in the situations that I'm describing here, where patients may have increased risk of suicidality or dementia and impulsive behaviour. That is a restriction.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's interesting because I've seen cases here in the Ottawa area where somebody had a mental breakdown and the doctors did call police and they seized his firearms. He actually had to go to court to prove that he did not have a mental condition or that he had passed the mental condition and it wasn't an issue, in order to get his firearms back. That's very interesting and it's something we'll explore further. Thank you.

Mr. Giltaca, would it be fair to say that your coalition represents the views of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of law-abiding firearms owners in this country?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I don't think I can claim to represent that number of people, but that's pretty much the consensus I think of certainly most people who would have a restricted PAL, meaning they're licensed to own handguns, and certainly a great number of the 2.3 million other licensed Canadians who own a variety of different firearms.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Of course, you can't obviously speak for every single person, but it's a large constituency.

Given how large the constituency of people's views you represent or are aligned closely with is, and the importance of firearms legislation to your community, it would seem prudent that any government consult with you guys about its proposals. Did the government consult with your organization or, as far as you know, any like-minded organizations when drafting Bill C-21?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: They haven't. We've been asking for a meeting with both the Minister of Public Safety back in the Bill Blair days and also the Prime Minister, and anyone else we can think of. We never got a reply, so no.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You're being ignored by this government. This democratic government is ignoring the perspective of hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have concerns about legislation that

disproportionately affects them, and you guys can't even get a meeting. That's very disturbing to me.

The Liberal government has repeatedly said that their legislation doesn't target law-abiding firearms owners, but I think we've seen with Bill C-71, the handgun freeze, and now Bill C-21, that the primary impact of this legislation is solely on law-abiding handgun owners or law-abiding firearms owners. Why do you think that is?

• (1855)

Mr. Rod Giltaca: My personal opinion is that it's ideological and it's political. That's why you'd have provisions in the bill that play no meaningful role in public safety. I don't want to put too fine a point on it, but that's my opinion.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: It seems to me what's at stake here with this legislation is that there's an entire culture of people in this country—who have been in this country even before we became a country—who are now going to be slowly phased out of existence by this government through this kind of legislation. It seems like they're phasing out law-abiding firearms owners, particularly handgun owners.

Is there any evidence that this legislation will do anything to phase out the real problem, which is violent criminals?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: There's no evidence that I'm aware of. I know that the government has had an opportunity in these hearings to provide evidence. I haven't seen anything at all that's compelling so far, but that's not for me to judge.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Do you think it's kind of disturbing? It appears like it's an entire group of law-abiding people, a culture. We've seen mounted sports shooters, IPSC and Olympic sports shooters who have come to this committee. Indigenous people earlier today said they weren't consulted. They said that this could potentially threaten their way of life and their treaty rights.

Do you think it's concerning that this government hasn't really consulted with any of these groups and that this legislation seems to disproportionately impact them and have an impact only on them and not on violent criminals?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: We're used to it. This has been going on for seven years. It is very disappointing, and it's very divisive to have firearm-related violence laid at your feet and have your life and choices be viewed as repugnant, as I mentioned in my opening statement.

It's very difficult. It's difficult for literally hundreds of thousands of Canadians to feel like they're a part of anything now. They're being blamed for something they have no part to play in. It's difficult.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We go now to Mr. Noormohamed, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you very much to the witnesses.

I'd like to start with Mr. Giltaca.

You began by saying that you don't feel as though the government has paid much attention to you and to your views. I'd like to change that now and pay some attention to you. You said that you speak for the vast majority of gun owners in this country. Is that true? Is that correct?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: No, that's not what I said.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You don't speak for the vast majority of gun owners. Who do you speak for? I have to say, you just told Mr. Lloyd that you do. Do you speak for hundreds of thousands?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: That's not what I said. We can play it back.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Who do you speak for?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: If I were to guess, I would speak directly for maybe 100,000 or 200,000 people.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's a goodly number of people.

Do you believe that they all share your organization's views?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: In our community, people are very independently minded. I don't think anyone shares all of each others' views, no.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I see.

Your vice-president of public relations, Tracey Wilson said on September 21 that she is the gun lobby. Does she speak for your organization?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I would say so, yes. I would say that's a correct statement. We are the gun lobby.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's a correct statement. Okay.

Would you agree with her statement, and by extension, do you believe that it is the view of all of your members that, "HAHAHA-HAHA we've survived 7 years of the most corrupt, divisive, hate inciting, failed government in the history of our country".

Mr. Rod Giltaca: That's a pretty accurate statement, I'd say, yes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You, sir, have come here with a political agenda of your own. Is that correct?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I'm coming here to defend the property and my dignity as a Canadian citizen, actually.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I see. Does defending your property and dignity involve the harassment of other individuals like my colleague Ms. Damoff?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I would hope that your defence of this bill consists of more than mean tweets.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: With respect, sir, your organization and vice-president have appeared to have a very good grip on delivering mean tweets, but that's not why we're here.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: It's in response to the abuse that we've taken for seven years.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I see. I'm sorry that you see the defence of saving lives as somehow abusive, but here we are.

Let's talk a little bit about some of the things that you have said.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Sure.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You have said that mass shootings in Canada, which include Polytechnique, Concordia, Dawson, Moncton, Fredericton, Edmonton, Vernon, the Quebec mosque, Penticton, Burk's Falls and Nova Scotia are just a small number of anomalies and outliers and that you don't legislate to prevent such tragedies unless you're an irrational zealot.

Is it your position that it's not worth trying to limit access to weapons that are commonly used in mass shootings because there are fewer such victims compared with other such gun crimes?

● (1900)

Mr. Rod Giltaca: It's my position that those are outlier events, depending on how you define mass shooting. There have been anywhere from seven to 15 of those in the last 60 years in Canada, so they happen very infrequently. They're terrible. No one's ever said that they weren't awful, absolutely, but you don't legislate based on outliers any more than you legislate against white rental vans because we had a van attack. Those victims deserve just as much respect as any other victim. Guns are the only topic where we act like that.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: With the greatest of respect, when you talk about defending life, you talk about outliers. You don't talk about suicides in homes where guns do end up killing people.

Do you think that it is reasonable, when you look at the outlier incidents, whether it's suicide or criminal acts, that we should be doing everything we can to take away the tools that are causing those injuries or deaths?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Our firearm suicides account for 14% to 16% of overall suicides in Canada. There are 4,000 suicides a year—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Don't you think that's too many?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Yes. One suicide is too many, but there are already—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Shouldn't we be doing everything we can to prevent those suicides?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: We are, and we are doing an incredible.... We have some of the toughest gun control laws on planet Earth—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Do you support those tough gun control laws?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I support any law that has a demonstrable positive effect on public safety.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If the police were to come before this committee, as they have—including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and other law enforcement—and said that they believe limiting firearms in homes would prevent suicides, would you agree with them?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: We limit firearms in homes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: They said that further limiting firearms in homes through this bill would further prevent suicide. Are you saying they're wrong?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I can't speak for the Association of Chiefs of Police. They've given you their opinion and I've given you mine.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Do you disagree with their opinion?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I don't know. I'd have to think about it a bit more.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Either you do.... I'm confused. Earlier you said that it wouldn't help prevent—

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I think the laws that we have right now are adequate. Firearms can be removed from anyone's home at a moment's notice if there's a safety concern—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: How quickly....? If somebody's going to—

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I'm not sure how we can get any better than that without banning guns.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's an interesting suggestion—

Mr. Rod Giltaca: You're advocating for the nuclear option right out of the gate. You won't even try anything else.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I don't think it's the nuclear option, sir, when law enforcement is coming before this committee and saying that fewer guns in homes will mean that fewer people die.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: What else did they say?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You're welcome to go back and listen to their testimony. They also said, sir, that the fewer the firearms that are available to people, the fewer the likely instances of crime they're going to see. Unless we all want to disagree with law enforcement and unless we want to say that the cops who are trying to keep our streets safe are wrong, sir, I think you and your organization may wish to reconsider your position on whether or not having fewer firearms is a good thing for this purported goal that you have of keeping Canada safer.

With the greatest respect, sir, I think that, in order to build legitimacy for one's cause, it would be helpful, as others have done before this committee—who have come to this committee with differing views from ours—to have the ability to do so and engage in ways that do not involve harassing members of this committee. I think we would be much more interested in hearing your views.

I have to tell you, the fact that you have chosen to come here and that you have done it under the pretext of the types of tweets and videos that have been put out seeking to harm people who are trying to keep this country safe is really disappointing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

I'll give the witness a chance to respond, if you wish.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I'm glad you got that off your chest.

When we entered the arena, I reached out to the Doctors for Protection from Guns, to PolySeSouvient and to all these groups. I said, "Hey, our interests actually align, so why don't we work together?" Do you know what I got? I'm pro-murder, I'm a misogynist and I'm a racist. It was so much so that those words don't mean what they're supposed to mean anymore. That's how the other side engages.

When we send mean tweets, apparently, it's the end of the world. Their response was the abuse we've taken for seven years.

I don't know. You can put it all on my shoulders. I can take it.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, it is now your turn for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will try to bring the tension down a bit.

Mr. Kapur, thank you for being here tonight and for using your valuable time to testify before us. I am sorry for the few interruptions earlier, but you must be used to it as an emergency physician.

In your opinion, the suicide rate in Canada is quite high compared with other countries. You also talked about the reporting system for people at risk, saying that the bill would have a very limited effect in that respect. Instead of asking a court to seize those people's guns, you believe that doctors should be able to report them directly to the police.

In Quebec, the Act to protect persons with regard to activities involving firearms, known as Anastasia's Law, came into force in 2008. This legislation authorizes any person working in a hospital centre who has reasonable cause to believe that a person is engaging in behaviour that may affect his or her safety or the safety of others with a firearm to report that behaviour to law enforcement.

To your knowledge, is this also the case in other Canadian provinces? If not, and without going so far as to put such a provision in federal legislation, since health is a provincial jurisdiction, would it be a good thing for other provinces to have similar legislation?

• (1905)

[*English*]

Dr. Atul Kapur: Thank you.

Anastasia's law is groundbreaking in Canada, and Quebec should be congratulated for bringing it forward.

As I said in response to a previous question, there are requirements for confidentiality with respect to what we learn in a doctor-patient relationship, and there are limited specific exclusions where we can breach that confidentiality. Anastasia's law provides for those. In many of the situations where we think that would be appropriate, it is not available in other jurisdictions.

We think this is an important aspect of it, this federal legislation with the improvements that we suggest, but it will need to be followed up with provincial changes to allow for that specific release of the confidentiality requirement.

The other aspect of Anastasia's law that has been unfortunate and disappointing is its limited effectiveness because of, we feel, two aspects. One is that not enough education has been done of the public and of medical practitioners on Anastasia's law existing. As well, there is the under-resourcing of the police, such that they are not always able to adequately respond when such notice is given to them. I think these are some areas for potential improvement and synchronization between federal law and the provincial jurisdictions.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I know that the government sees the proliferation of firearms as a public safety issue, and it is absolutely right. However—and this is a question I like to ask health professionals—what do you think about the notion that the government should also see the proliferation of guns as a public health problem, and why?

[English]

Dr. Atul Kapur: As I said at the beginning, we find that a lot of the debate is focused on intentional violence, homicide and other areas of interpersonal violence. The true fact is that three out of four firearm deaths in Canada are suicides. Therefore, that is a great way for us to intervene and prevent access to such a lethal means of completing suicide.

We think there is still progress to be made. Studies have shown that our previous legislation has had beneficial effects in reducing the firearm suicide rates, and we believe we can make more progress and further improve those statistics. We still have some of the highest firearm suicide rates in the developed world, so there is further room for us to improve.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

Mr. Giltaca, I'd like to come back to some of your comments.

I still find it rather curious that you said you contacted organizations like PolySeSouvient because you would have common interests. Indeed, I have also seen several tweets in which you have been quite aggressive towards them. I'll read one.

[English]

It says, "All anti-gun people are irrational, hyperbolic, dishonest, low-ability, slanderous, hateful fearmongers", whatever that means.

• (1910)

[Translation]

So I can't imagine how you were able to work with that organization.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned all the groups that came to the committee to tell us how Bill C-21 was not the solution to the gun problem. However, I think you may have failed to mention all of the groups that came to us and said that Bill C-21 had some positive effects and that maybe we should go further.

I think that should also be considered, as well as polls that show that the majority of gun owners support, among other things, an assault weapons ban: 77%, according to Environics Analytics, and 70%, according to Léger Marketing.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

I'll give Mr. Giltaca a chance to respond, if he so wishes.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I don't think there's anything to respond to there.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Kapur, I'd like to start with you.

Honestly, the red flag law section of this bill has been the one that I think all committee members have been agonizing over because the testimony regarding it has really been all over the place.

I've read your organization's brief on this. I think that if we can find a way to give physicians the ability to talk freely with law enforcement, there's a willingness to do that. You have raised a similar concern as other witnesses, which is, namely, that placing the onus on someone to go through an already overburdened court system is problematic.

How should I phrase this question?

The police have repeated this. They feel that if there is an emergency situation, you should always go to the police. However, we've heard from other witnesses, and I've certainly heard this from people who have talked to me outside of committee hearings, that some groups may have a distrustful relationship with the police.

In your mind, would having this alternative route through the courts still serve a purpose in some situations, as long as it's clearly understood that it's not to be a first resort and that you should always go to the police first?

I just want to hear some of your thoughts on that.

Dr. Atul Kapur: It's taking me a bit outside of my area of my expertise.

I'm looking at this as an emergency physician contemplating a situation where I see a patient in front of me who is having suicidal ideation, who has dementia and impulsiveness, or who may be a victim of interpersonal violence. In those situations, we are saying that we, as the physicians, can be the reporting person. That takes away some of those roadblocks for family members or victims to make those reports.

It's similar to what we are called upon to do with people who are at risk of having a licence to drive. In those situations, it's not the individual but the emergency physician, or perhaps the family doctor, who would be making that report. That would hopefully take away some of those barriers.

Whether the court is there as a court of last resort doesn't really affect that kind of situation. I'm not sure I have a specific answer for you on whether keeping the court there as a possibility is helpful or a hindrance. We are saying that we need to have a more timely mechanism to help make this provision of the act actually fulfill its goal.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I appreciate that. Thank you. That was a helpful answer.

Mr. Giltaca, I'd like to turn to you.

It's nice to meet the head of the organization who was tagging me on all of the Instagram posts. Welcome to the committee.

In your opening statement, you did reference the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. I found their time at this committee very valuable, as I have in all of their appearances. I think Chief Evan Bray does a credit to the service.

When you took the time to quote their stance, they did say, "We believe that a handgun freeze is one method of reducing access", so you have to acknowledge that they are, in a way, supporting a handgun freeze. I know they put it into perspective by adding, "allowing existing law-abiding handgun owners to practice their sport."

Most of the people in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford are long-gun owners. They use those long guns for a demonstrated purpose, like around the farm to go hunting. There's a demonstrated need for a long gun. With a handgun, it's harder to make the argument. They are, by their very nature, more dangerous. They're easy to conceal. Some of them can discharge a high number of bullets in a very short period of time.

I'm asking you, sir, if we are to try to find some way to honour what the CACP is trying to do, what restrictions are you prepared to accept as an organization to both respect a handgun freeze, but to also allow sport shooters to continue to sport? You have to meet the CACP halfway on this.

• (1915)

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Gun owners have lived under progressively more and more gun control over the last 30 years. Handguns in particular—any restricted firearm—are some of the most strictly regulated properties that a civilian can have. There are a myriad of regulations: storage regulations, transport regulations and handling. You

can only shoot them at an approved shooting range. When you transport them there, they have to be unloaded with a secure locking device on the firearm and in a locked case, and you have to go straight there. If you deviate from that route, it's a criminal offence, punishable by criminal sanctions. It's not a fine. It's not a regulatory offence. It's the very strictly—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes, I understand that. We're all very familiar with those rules, but I'm asking you what you are prepared to accept as further restrictions, because the CACP did say that a national handgun freeze is one method of reducing access to these.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I think police in general want anything dangerous out of the hands of anyone. They're supportive of banning airsoft. They're supportive of banning toys because they look like real guns, and I get that. They're always going to err on the side of officer safety and public safety under any circumstances, but I think in our society we need to be able to have property. We need to be able to have things. Motor vehicles are incredibly dangerous, far more dangerous than firearms are. They can be misused, just like firearms, but we accept in our society that people should have an ability to have motor vehicles, even some that can go 200 miles an hour, unregulated.

It's really a matter, in my opinion, of... We are not anti-regulation. We need to have effective regulations that keep firearms out of the hands of people who would misuse them—for sure, there's no argument there—and find a way for us to continue to own our property as long as we do it responsibly. When someone colours outside the lines, yes, come down on them. Take their things, no problem, but we have to be able to live. People have had handguns for over a hundred years in this country. They've been registered since 1934.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I'm going to have to cut it off here. Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

That brings our first round to a close. We will start our second round. We will have to do an abbreviated second round, with one slot per party.

We'll start with Mr. Van Popta for five minutes, please.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here with us here today.

I'm going to start with you, Mr. Giltaca. Thank you for being here and for your testimony.

You were asked earlier whether you agreed with the proposition that every gun added into our community brings our community closer to danger. I would challenge the premise of that question, which is that all gun owners are the same. When I came on to this committee, I decided to take the PAL course, just to see what it was like. I was successful. I now have my PAL licence. I was very impressed with how safety conscious people in this community are.

Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I teach the PAL course, and I've run 3,500 people through that course. I did it a long time, and I will say there were probably, to be honest, 10 or 20 people who didn't make it—twice—through the course. I did advise them not to buy any firearms, because it just wasn't something that was for them.

I think most people have the same reaction that you did, that the amount of regulation is more than sufficient and the safety is sufficient. Now, there are things that could be improved. I'm more than happy to submit some ideas in a brief before the deadline, but yes, I think most people who have gone through it would agree. They got their licence, saw what this was all about, understood why people own firearms in the first place and how important it is to them. I'm glad you had that experience.

- (1920)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

In an earlier study that this committee conducted about guns and gangs, we learned that the vast majority of firearms used in crime were smuggled in from the United States. One of our witnesses said that we live beside the largest gun manufacturing culture in the world, and we share the longest undefended border with them, so admittedly this creates a big problem for us.

Perhaps you could comment on that, the difference between guns owned by lawful gun owners and guns smuggled out of the United States by criminal gangs.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Yes. The overwhelming number of firearms used in criminal behaviour come from the United States. That's anywhere from 80% to 90%, and it varies by jurisdiction. For instance, there are some smaller cities in Canada where they would have more domestically sourced guns, but they're seizing fewer guns overall so even just a little bump in domestically sourced guns reflect as a higher percentage.

Typically 80% to 90% come from the United States. The remainder of those—virtually all of those that would be domestically sourced—are stolen guns, which is property crime. When it comes to handguns, they're very securely stored, as we know. The law makes us do that. Then, a very small percentage—in fact, we found out what the percentage is, because it's not available data in Canada—around 0.007% of gun owners engage in straw purchasing. We think there were somewhere around 50 instances of that over the last 24 years. It's a very minuscule amount of that. There are some stolen guns, and then the overwhelming majority are from the United States.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you for that.

I have a question about handguns. It's following up on the question from Mr. MacGregor about regulating handguns. I don't have

my RPAL, just my PAL. I recognize that there are even stricter regulations around having a handgun.

Would you agree with even stricter regulations rather than an outright ban? Do you think that's necessary?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I think there are a few holes that could be plugged in the system.

I'll give you an example. During the PAL application process, you have to provide two references from people who have known you for two years or longer. If you're married or common-law, then your spouse has to sign off on your ability to own and use firearms. Ninety per cent of those references are never called. We did an ATIP on that.

In my opinion, one of the most important aspects of that application process is the human intelligence. You're asking someone if they're okay with their applicant friend having a firearms licence. That aspect of the system that already exists is not being used.

That's a really great example. We could call 100% of all applicant references for probably \$2 million or \$4 million a year, but we won't do that. We won't even use that to see if that works. Remember, only a tiny fraction of these guns are ever domestically sourced for criminal behaviour anyway. We won't do even that tiny fraction. We want to ban handguns instead, because it's ideological, as we've seen.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Popta.

We go now to Ms. Damoff for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Dr. Kapur, thank you so much for appearing, especially on such short notice. You talked about mandatory reporting for firearms. We know it's difficult because it crosses several jurisdictions, including rules that doctors impose on themselves.

I'm wondering if you'd be supportive of a federal requirement for mandatory reporting. It's something that we could hopefully put into Bill C-21. If there were reasonable grounds to show that a patient might pose a danger to themselves or others, then there would be a mandatory requirement that you report that belief to a peace officer, firearms officer or chief firearms officer for use as evidence in an ex parte application.

My question though is whether that amendment would hold up, given that health professionals are regulated by provincial colleges. Would it also open you up to civil and regulatory actions? I'm curious to hear what your take on that would be.

• (1925)

Dr. Atul Kapur: I am proudly not a lawyer. I would say that I think the ideal situation would be to have a framework in which the federal government and the various provinces would work together on allowing this system to happen.

We have similar examples with mandatory reporting of gunshot wounds, which is the law in nine provinces, I believe, and one territory. That relieves physicians of their responsibility to protect confidentiality and, as I understand it, relieves us of the risk of civil liability.

I'm saying that as a non-lawyer. I believe it is possible to do it. In the case of gunshot wound reporting, it occurred organically. It started in Ontario and was such a good idea that it was widely accepted and spread across the country.

I believe the federal government could easily set up a template and work with the provinces and territories. This would allow for appropriate legislation in the various provinces and territories. That would remove the requirement for the colleges of physicians and surgeons—the regulator—to make that decision themselves, as legislation overrules the rules of the colleges of physicians and surgeons. I think it needs to occur together.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you very much, Doctor.

Mr. Giltaca, two of the policies you have are self-defence with a firearm, and concealed or open carry. They're on your website. Do you think that Canadians support those policies?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I think some do.

The reason those are on our website is for gun owners to know where we stand on different issues, but we've never actively lobbied for either of those things. We're quite a ways away from there. We're facing a gun ban.

Ms. Pam Damoff: They are policies of your organization, though.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Yes, absolutely they are.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You know that you don't have right to a firearm in Canada. Is that correct?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: The Supreme Court has said something to that effect. Yes, that's right.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I just get confused because your organization talks about firearm rights. I have been subject—I see Ms. Wilson is here—to many of your tactics and attacks from your membership,

who have wished me to go kill myself. That was the most recent one. I didn't know that KYS meant that.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I don't know what that means, either.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I had to look it up, but it—

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Yes. I'm sorry that has happened to you. Some things have happened to me too.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'll tell you, sir, that after you've appeared today, and Ms. Wilson tweets about me, I am going to be bombarded—and I have been for years—with your attacks, but I do want to thank you, because you came to my riding in 2019 and in 2021 with your Canadian NRA talking points, and I want to thank you for helping get me re-elected.

I will leave it at that and move back to Dr. Kapur.... No I won't, because I have 15 seconds left, Chair.

The Chair: Do you wish to respond?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Yes, I do.

We've never been in your riding spreading anything to do with firearms stuff. We did—

Ms. Pam Damoff: You came in 2019 on a bus. Tracey Wilson—

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Oh, that one, yes. Do you know what? You're right.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I know I am. You were there twice in 2021.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: That was a fun project.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You've been to my riding three times.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, all.

We will go now to Madame Michaud, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

Mr. Giltaca, an article in *Le Droit* in May 2022 reported that, even before the nature of the proposals in Bill C-21 was known, your coalition said it was prepared to oppose arbitrary, punitive, and ineffective measures and to defend the ability of legal gun owners to own and enjoy their lawfully acquired property. We understand that you are against gun bans in general. You say that they don't work and that you don't really believe in them.

However, it is rather curious that, on the other side of the border, our neighbours to the south are carrying out a debate going in a direction contrary to your view. More and more American groups are calling for tighter gun control. As of last May, guns have become the leading cause of death among young Americans, ahead of traffic accidents, according to a recent study by health officials that shows a sharp rise in gun homicides in the United States.

Don't you feel that, by comparison, our gun control prevents tragedies like those repeatedly suffered by the Americans? I want to acknowledge that we have had our share of tragedies. However, the situation is quite pronounced among Americans. What do you think about that?

• (1930)

[English]

Mr. Rod Giltaca: The situation, when it comes to firearms—why you can own firearms, how they're obtained, everything—is completely different in the United States than it is in Canada. The United States has virtually no firearm regulations to speak of in comparison to Canada. In fact, if you look at the anti-gun groups in the United States, all of them are asking for what we have in Canada right now. They have no licensing. They have no storage regulations. They have nothing there.

I encounter this all of the time, people using studies and anecdotes from the United States. They do not apply. We've had gun control here for 30 years, since the early 1990s. We have a very strict regime in Canada. Licensed gun owners abide by it or they have their guns taken away. I think most people just want to continue to live their lives without this government intervention.

Hopefully that helped. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Unfortunately, there are always exceptions to the rule. Some legal gun owners have committed atrocities in Canada and Quebec. We are not immune to them. It may be a good idea to regulate firearms.

I've heard you talk about effective regulations. Can you give us an example—

The Chair: You have only a few seconds left, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

Ask a very quick question.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: What do you think effective regulations would be in Canada?

[English]

Mr. Rod Giltaca: There are a lot of different aspects of firearm regulation.

I have my own concerns with holes in the system. I talked about the licensing system, the application and that the firearms program doesn't call references. Especially if you think in terms of domestic violence, if someone's husband is trying to get a firearms licence, and they're never called, and that person gets a firearms licence and can own and use firearms, that's a concern for me.

We're more than happy to work with anyone to get rid of some of those loopholes and make sure that the system is as tight as it possibly can be while allowing people to just own their property and continue to live their lives. That's all we're really after.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. MacGregor, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

I keep on hearing on the word “ban” being used in place of a phrase. I think it's important to use the correct terminology. What Bill C-21 does is that people who currently own handguns will be allowed to keep them and use them. They may not be able to buy a new one, sell the one that they own or transfer it to another person after Bill C-21, but they will still be able to use the handguns they currently legally own. It's very important to get that clearly on the record.

Secondly, for the vast majority of people who are out there using long guns, Bill C-21 is not going to impact them. People with a possession and acquisition licence can still go out and buy a bolt-action rifle or a shotgun. This bill is not going to impact them.

If there are restrictions trying to control the number of handguns in Canada, and people still want to get into sport shooting disciplines, there are still options with rifles. Would you agree with all of that? There are options for people to engage in sport shooting with rifles.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: Yes. I agree.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Again, Mr. Giltaca, I have to put it to you that it's handguns, specifically, that are on the spot right now. There are major concerns with them. We've heard it at this committee. Again, I think the onus is on you. What further restrictions...?

Right now, if you look at the exceptions that have been put into the law, they allow for people who are training, competing or coaching in a handgun shooting discipline that is on the International Olympic Committee or the International Paralympic Committee.

What further restrictions do you think handgun owners or your organization will be able to accept, if we're trying to meet this goal of putting a freeze on the number of handguns in circulation, to be able to continue doing their sport shooting?

Mr. Rod Giltaca: The reason I call it a “ban” is that when I die, the RCMP will come and confiscate all of my firearms, all of my handguns and, of course, my semi-auto rifles that were banned in May 2022. There are probably half a million long guns sitting in safes. People just can't use them.

No one can tell us exactly why all of those people, who haven't done anything to deserve it, can't use them, but I guess it was politically expedient at the time.

This is a ban. They're trying to make people like me extinct, because obviously we're terrible. As far as—

• (1935)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do you have other rifles that are untouched by the OIC or—

Mr. Rod Giltaca: I'm running out of firearms, because I lost all of the semi-autos and now it's the handguns.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Come on, Mr. Giltaca. There are lots of firearms you could still purchase with your PAL.

Mr. Rod Giltaca: What happens when these ones and the handguns are gone? It's going to be the same conversation. “Well, you still have two rifles left. You can certainly use those.”

To be fair, the onus isn't on me to prove why I should still own guns. The onus is on the government to prove that it's going to have a demonstrable positive effect on public safety. It keeps getting switched around. Somehow, I have to defend what I've been doing for 20 years and what Canadians have been doing for over 100 years. Now the onus is on us.

The government has all of the data. It has everything. It should be able to show us. Have we seen any data that this will have a demonstrable positive effect on public safety? I've watched every hearing and I haven't seen any yet. I've seen lots of rhetoric. We've had all kinds of interesting things happen tonight, but I haven't seen any real data.

It's just, “You know, you don't really need them anyway.” I have to disagree. There are two million people who own firearms and 650,000 who are licensed to own handguns, and we haven't done anything.

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off there. I'm sorry.

That brings this panel to a close. I thank both witnesses for appearing and helping us with our inquiries. Your expertise and your experience are helpful.

With that, we will suspend to bring in the next panel.

• (1935)

(Pause)

• (1940)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

With us by video conference for this second hour, we have, from the Battered Women's Support Services, Angela Marie Mac-Dougall, executive director. From Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, we have Louise Riendeau, co-responsible for political issues. From Women's Shelters Canada, we have Lise Martin, executive director.

Welcome to you all and thank you for joining us tonight. I will give you up to five minutes per group to make an opening statement. We will start with Ms. Riendeau.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau (Co-responsible, Political Issues, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Good evening.

I thank the members of the committee for letting us bring our perspective to the issue of gun control based on our experience with thousands of women who are victims of domestic violence.

The Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale includes 46 assistance and shelter homes located in different regions of Quebec. Our organization feels that Bill C-21 will certainly improve the safety of Canadians.

Tonight, we will be talking specifically about the safety of women who are victims of domestic violence. We would like to highlight two positive aspects of the bill as it relates to domestic violence. The first is the fact that a firearms licence will not be issued when there is a protection order in place. The second is the fact that the licence can be revoked if a person has committed acts of domestic violence.

On the other hand, we are concerned about some of the provisions in Bill C-21.

The first, called “red flag” measures, enable a person to go directly to court to request the revocation of a firearms licence. Since victims and those close to people with issues can already go to the police department or the chief firearms officer, we think these measures are unnecessary and may even be counterproductive for victims. We are concerned that police officers, instead of taking the investigative steps to revoke a licence, will ask victims to do so themselves. In our view, it would be much more burdensome for a victim to go to court than to go to the police department.

Therefore, we recommend that clauses 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12, which introduce these “red flag” measures, be withdrawn. As we have stated, we believe that the current system, where concerned individuals can go to the police department or to the office of the chief firearms officer, is more appropriate and better adapted to the reality. Victims don't have the energy or the fortitude to go to court to request licence revocation at a time when they have all kinds of steps to take to escape violence and protect themselves.

The second provision of concern to us is the provision indicating that the person whose licence is revoked would have a so-called reasonable period to deliver their firearms to the police or otherwise dispose of them. While a search is possible, it is not automatic. In addition, the period may give some abusive spouses or ex-spouses time to kill their spouse or children. Therefore, we believe that firearms should be delivered promptly, to a police officer.

Improvements can also be made to other aspects of the bill. In our view, it would be wise to include a definition of spousal or domestic violence in the bill. This would make it possible for a licence to be revoked in cases of domestic violence. It would also ensure that police and chief firearms officers consider the entire situation, not just the physical acts of violence that constitute offences.

This definition should cover all aspects of coercive violence or control. The Divorce Act already contains such a definition. Domestic or family violence is not just physical or sexual abuse that is an offence, but is expressed in a variety of manifestations that are intended to control a spouse and her children.

This evening, I am submitting to the committee tools that our association has just produced for judicial actors. The documents titled “Comprendre le contrôle coercitif” and “Principales manifestations du contrôle coercitif” outline many of the tactics used by abusive spouses to infringe on the freedom and safety of victims. I am also adding the document “Le contrôle coercitif, prédicteur de risques homicides.”

Research has demonstrated the links between coercive control and spousal homicide. For example, in the United Kingdom, a study of 358 spousal homicides showed the presence of coercive control in 92% of cases. In Canada, other studies found that spousal homicides occurred in the context of separation and that homicide or attempted homicide was the first act of physical violence for one-third of victims.

I think we really need to go further and expand the scope of the bill. Police officers and chief firearms officers need to be given all the elements necessary to recognize the presence of coercive control, rather than just looking at incidents of physical violence. Inserting a definition of violence in the bill that includes coercive control would be a first step

• (1945)

Police response can also be greatly improved, and police officers can be made to take victims' concerns seriously by being provided with training to assess situations based on known risk factors.

I am a member of the committee that reviews domestic violence deaths in Quebec. In the vast majority of cases, several risk factors were present, but the responders often did not recognize them.

Therefore, it is really necessary to provide the police and the office of the chief firearms officer with an exhaustive list of risk factors related to domestic or family violence, which will enable them to handle the requests with all the necessary seriousness. They also need to be trained beforehand to recognize the presence of domestic violence even when there is no physical assault or offence. The tools I have submitted to the committee could be used for these purposes.

Other improvements are also desired. We have read the brief filed by PolySeSouvient and the brief filed by the National Association of Women and the Law, and we fully support them. They contain a number of recommendations for better gun control and safety for women.

As I said, we believe that Bill C-21 is a step in the right direction. However, we hope that improvements will be made to ensure better protection for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

We remain available to the committee for discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Riendeau.

[*English*]

We'll go now to Ms. Martin to make a five-minute statement. Please go ahead for five minutes.

• (1950)

Ms. Lise Martin (Executive Director, Women's Shelters Canada): Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee.

Before I begin my presentation, I would like to express my frustration at the late invitation, three days prior, to appear before this committee. We are a small organization with limited resources and a very full agenda. Taking the time to prepare for and attend the session on such short notice presents significant challenges and does make us wonder if the link to gender-based violence against women is simply an afterthought for the committee.

Women's Shelters Canada is a national, non-profit organization representing 15 provincial shelter associations and over 600 violence against women shelters and transition houses across the country. Bill C-21 is an important bill for those of us concerned with gender-based violence. Having said that, we do have some concerns and suggestions as to how the bill could be strengthened.

Guns are used to terrorize, injure and kill women and their children in urban as well as rural settlements. We know that the risks are higher in rural communities where there are more guns, more opposition to gun control and fewer supports for women living with violence.

According to the Canadian Femicide Observatory, there was a 26% increase in the killings of women and girls from 2019 to 2021. In 2021, 173 women and girls were violently killed. When known, 38% of these murders were with a firearm. As a result of these killings, 164 children were left without a mother. The 2021 report made it abundantly clear that, proportionate to their population size, small, rural and remote communities bear a larger burden of femicides than urban ones.

Firearms cause harm to women in ways other than by death and injury. In our annual “Shelter Voices” survey, we ask shelters to report on a specific 24-hour period. One of the questions is this: To your knowledge, how many women currently residing at the shelter have been threatened by a gun? Since the survey began, the average number of shelters that have responded is 230, and the average number of women staying at the shelter on that day who had been threatened by a gun is 100. The link between guns and violence against women is clear, as is the link between guns and the instance of lethality for victims of domestic violence.

It is my understanding that the bill will revoke an individual’s licence if they have engaged in an act of domestic violence, stalking or become subject to a protection order. In order to maximize the potential benefits of this, we feel that there are several concerns that need to be addressed.

We feel it is necessary to define domestic and family violence within the bill. Our suggestion is to refer to the definition of family violence recently adopted in the Divorce Act.

We have concerns in terms of the time it may take between when it is deemed that the firearm must be removed and when this happens. It has been documented numerous times that women are at the highest levels of danger of lethality when they make it known to their abuser that they are leaving the situation.

The bill authorizes the issuance, in certain circumstances, of a conditional licence for the purposes of sustenance or employment. We strongly feel that the employment exemption must be removed. One example here is the case of police officers. Although there is limited research in Canada, research done in the United States suggests that officers are more likely to abuse their domestic partners than the general public. In Nova Scotia alone, 14 police officers from across the province have been charged with crimes connected to domestic violence since 2012.

In closing, I would like to stress the importance of the need to improve the processes associated with screening gun owners and removing firearms from people who are at risk to themselves or others.

The federal government uses its powers to make decisions about who can have firearm licences. Despite the fact that several measures were introduced to help ensure this power, multiple inquests and inquiries have shown that this is not being done. We strongly recommend ensuring that there is strong language reinforcing this responsibility. The need for greater resources, commitments and accountability measures will be key in the successful implementation of this bill.

Women's Shelters Canada has been advocating for a national action plan on gender-based violence for over a decade. Key to our

call for a national action plan is the need for consistency across and within jurisdictions in policies and legislation that address gender-based violence against women. It will be important that this be an integral part of the implementation of this bill.

● (1955)

Finally, as a member of the Coalition for Gun Control and as a signatory to the brief submitted by the National Association of Women and the Law, we would like to publicly state that we are in agreement with both of their detailed recommendations.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Martin.

We'll go now to Ms. MacDougall.

Go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall (Executive Director, Battered Women's Support Services): Good evening, and thank you very much to the committee for this opportunity to join you.

I am here representing Battered Women's Support Services on the unceded ancestral territory of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam people.

For the last 43 years, Battered Women's Support Services has worked to end gender-based violence through support services, training, education and other community-based responses, including research and policy.

It's a pleasure to join you this evening to discuss gun violence in Canada. We understand that it has a hugely disproportionate impact on women and girls. We recognize that what hurts and kills women and girls is gender inequity. This effort to take action on gun violence has to be in concert with what Women's Shelters Canada has been leading around—

The Chair: Ms. MacDougall, can I get you to speak slower for the interpreters?

Thank you.

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Absolutely. I apologize.

We recognize that what hurts and kills women and girls is actually gender inequity, and we are 100% in support of Women's Shelters Canada's work over the last 10 years to advance a national action plan on gender-based violence that takes into consideration the experiences of women and girls all across the land, both in rural and urban settings, and that has taken great effort to highlight prevention, support services, legal responses, social infrastructure and specific supports for indigenous survivors across the country.

Coroners have consistently identified access to firearms as one of the top five of 10 risk factors when determining when a woman will die in domestic violence situations. We understand that the presence of a firearm in the home must be determined and, if present, should be considered a high risk factor for homicide by a family member.

In Canada, women own less than 2% of registered firearms. This analysis helps us understand that women are twice as likely as men to experience being sexually assaulted, beaten, strangled or threatened with a gun or a knife. While firearm-related violent crime continues to represent a small proportion of overall police-reported violent crime, the proportion of lethal violence that involved a firearm rose from 26% of all homicides to 37% in 2020.

We are, of course, concerned about the relationship to gun violence and the killing of women and girls, but we must also recognize that 42% of intimate femicides were actually because of stabbings and knife violence, which speaks to the piece around the cultural shifts that would need to happen. Given that femicides are not currently uniformly documented, we understand that firearms in femicide are also not documented accurately and that would be an important piece of this action.

As my colleagues have said earlier, Battered Women's Support Services also endorses the National Association of Women and the Law and its submission on this matter. I would like to point out a few pieces that we agree with.

One is the removal of the employment exception. This is very important, because we understand that a job that requires using a gun is never the only vocation open to an individual. Regardless of an individual's past or qualifications, there will always be jobs available to them that do not have that requirement, so we are concerned that this section would be interpreted by how permissive chief firearm officers may be in granting conditional licences not based on need but based on an individual's job preference.

In echoing what Lise mentioned earlier, we understand that research suggests that police officers are even more likely than the general population to commit physical violence against a partner. Needless to say, the obstacles to reporting domestic violence are heightened for victims of police officers. Police officers are rarely disciplined or prosecuted for acts of domestic violence. They should not benefit from a legal exemption to losing their licence when they do so.

The other piece we think is important is strengthening the provisions around a licence in cases of domestic violence. We most definitely are concerned about giving chief firearms officers broad discretions to determine whether domestic violence has occurred. We are concerned that we do not have a proper definition of domestic violence and family violence in the bill. This would be an essential piece.

As has been stated earlier, we think there is good language within the Divorce Act, but more than that, we must also recognize that domestic violence and stalking are not defined, and that stalking is also a lethality factor.

We also would want to be certain that we are defining protection orders in the regulation. We would not want to see an opportunity where a protection order—

● (2000)

The Chair: Madam, I'm going to have to ask you to wrap up, if you could.

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: —could be given different names and take different forms. We are concerned with the lack of consultation to date on how to define them in the regulation and we would want to ensure that the definition of protection orders is included in the act.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll start our rounds of questions at this point. We will start with Mr. Lloyd for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here and especially for the great work you do in our communities. I come from a rural community, and we just got the first new women's shelter in rural Alberta since 1984. It is a needed thing for our rural communities as well as for our urban communities, so thank you for the often thankless work that you ladies do in our communities.

I find something interesting.

Ms. MacDougall, you were saying that there's not good enough data on firearms and femicides, but do any of you have possibly any data that breaks down whether or not the firearms being used in femicides or the perpetrators of the femicides are legal gun owners or illegal gun owners, licensed gun owners or non-licensed gun owners? Do you have any anecdotal information about that?

Maybe I'll start with Ms. Martin.

Ms. Lise Martin: Actually, yes. I could get the exact citations, but I believe, according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory, most women who are killed with guns are killed by legal gun owners.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That is surprising to me, and I would appreciate it if you could send that data to us as well.

Ms. Lise Martin: Sure.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Ms. Riendeau, you also said that the risk factors are not identified. You might agree, or maybe I'm wrong, that it's not a spouse committing a homicide that is the first risk factor that's seen. In some cases it might happen, but there are usually risk factors leading up to that. Would you say that's correct?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Yes.

In many cases of femicide, some of which even resulted in the death of children, there were risk factors. The most important risk factor is often the presence of past domestic abuse that was not taken into consideration or taken seriously by the police. There are other risk factors, such as depression in a spouse, which is not always considered.

Also, some scientifically recognized risk factors do not always seem to be known by police departments or a number of responders, hence the need for training. We also know that police services will focus on incidents that are recognized as offences. However, domestic or family violence manifests itself in all sorts of ways that, taken in isolation, may seem trivial. That is why we are saying that responders and police need to be trained.

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I agree. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Ms. MacDougall, we've heard testimony—and I knew this before we had this study—that the Canadian firearms program currently doesn't contact every reference when completing a firearms licence application. You have to put down your spouse or your common-law partner or even past spouses, and they have to consent to your receiving a firearms licence.

Does it concern you that the Canadian firearms program has the tools to call these references to ask if they have concerns, but 90% of them are not being called, as one witness stated?

• (2005)

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Absolutely. I think that is one of the real problems when we think about what this will look like on the ground. We know it's very hard to follow through on this kind of follow-up, this important follow-up, and we see this in all areas within the system, in terms of the criminal response, regardless of what the aspect of domestic violence is. It has to do with some difficulties with the way in which employees interpret their roles and also the overall kind of continuous lack of concern about the lethality of domestic violence and family violence.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Something I've observed is that it seems as though we do have a lot of tools available, but the tragedies we've seen have been primarily caused by our not using those tools in the way that is needed. Currently we don't have the resources to identify when somebody has a mental illness and, even in the case of the Canadian firearms program, we're not calling the references. We're not using the tools that we have available in order to really prevent these terrible tragedies and these terrible crimes from happening, yet we're putting more legislation on when we're not using the tools that we have available now.

I agree with what you and all the witnesses were saying about the protection orders. I think there are tweaks that we can make that will improve this, but wouldn't you agree that, until we're actually putting the resources into accountability and into ensuring that the tools that we have are being used, we're not going to see a drop in domestic violence with firearms? Would there be broad agreement?

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: I do agree with that. It is certainly a concern that we have. I know that advocates end up having to follow up to see that the system does follow through on the poli-

cies, as well as the practices. Canada has some of the best legislation to address sexualized and domestic violence, but unfortunately we continue to see where the system fails repeatedly. It's a bigger cultural shift that we need.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Madame Riendeau, I have limited time left, but I'd like to hear your perspective, as I see your hand is up.

The Chair: You have no time left, but certainly the witness can answer.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I would add that the way to make a difference is to move away from discretionary powers and instead put strong language into the legislation. This would give chief firearms officers obligations, not just powers.

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We go now to Ms. Damoff for six minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses today.

Ms. Martin, I will apologize on behalf of the committee for the short notice. I know that all of the witnesses are doing good work to save women's lives, and the time you take to prepare and appear before the committee is greatly appreciated by all of us.

I want to ask about red flags because we have heard conflicting testimony on that provision in the bill. I've spoken with the women's shelter in my riding about the fact that this is an additional tool that is not meant to replace calling the police, but a tool that a woman could use. For example, if she is married to a police officer, she's probably not comfortable calling the police. Likewise, if she's an indigenous woman she might have a complete mistrust in the police because she might get arrested for a probation order violation, which is a true story.

We've heard testimony that we should get rid of it completely. Are you opposed to this being an additional tool, because it has been tweaked from the original Bill C-21 so that this can now be done anonymously and also so that someone else can go to court on behalf of the woman.

I'm just wondering about that. Perhaps, Ms. Martin, we can start with you, and then I welcome the other ladies chiming in on it.

• (2010)

Ms. Lise Martin: Sure.

It definitely is an additional tool, but I think the other side of that coin is that we have to make sure that the onus doesn't fall on the women. By having that tool, the other piece of this, the part that we were just talking about, which is the responsibility of the firearms officers, is that we need to ensure there is not confusion about responsibility.

I think in the cases you've cited—and these are happening every day in all provinces and territories—it could be a useful tool, and adding the anonymous component is important to that.

I think my concern is about the responsiveness within the judicial system, so if we're going to do this.... It's like other measures we've talked about within the bill, that implementation really is going to be key, and for implementation to happen you need goodwill and you need resources. You need more than goodwill to be honest, because you need accountability so that people understand that this is part of their jobs.

I'll leave it at that and allow my other colleagues to respond as well.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes. No one wants to put the onus on the victim at all. This is a very difficult life-threatening situation that women find themselves in.

Ms. Lise Martin: You'd want to make sure that they can easily have access to that judicial system, for example, and either a shelter or another service provider, so that there is that easy access for that reporting mechanism and so that the reporting mechanism will be swift as well.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: We have asked that the “red flag” measures be removed because we believe that they may harm more women than they would help, although it is true that these measures may be relevant to some women in the situations you mention. In practice, however, in everyday life, we have often seen police officers fail to take responsibility.

I will give you an example. In the Criminal Code, section 810 makes it possible to apply for a peace bond. Normally, when a person says they fear for their safety, the police should investigate and notify the prosecutor. The person may also do so themselves. However, there have been many instances where police officers have told victims to ask their lawyer to do so. Unfortunately, women have lost their lives in the meantime.

We believe that police departments must fulfill their duties. Every effort must be made to prevent this measure from enabling police officers to avoid their responsibilities. We think that, in the heat of the moment, with all the work that police officers have to do, they are very likely to ask the woman to take her own measures.

If the “red flag” measures are maintained, mechanisms are needed to prevent police officers and the department that handles gun control from shirking their responsibilities.

Having to go back to court, especially to request that children be cared for despite the spouse's refusal, is always a difficult and arduous process for a woman. When she is fleeing abuse, she has a lot to deal with.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Can I just interrupt you and ask a question?

If a woman is married to a police officer and is being abused, and the police officer has a gun in the home, whom should she call?

I'm not trying to be cheeky.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: These are very complex situations. When a police officer's wife is housed, the only solution is often to call the superior, as there is sometimes collusion among colleagues.

Recently, in Quebec, we saw a police officer's union request an absolute discharge so that he would not lose his job. You are right to say that this is a serious concern, which weighs against any employment-based exemption criteria.

• (2015)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Madame Michaud please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you. Mr. Chair.

Thank you ladies, for being here with us this evening.

I wanted to ask you about the red flag provisions on which we've heard several different points of view. I understand some of what you have been mentioning. Rather than ask why you are against measures of this kind, I will focus on your proposals.

Ms. Riendeau, your organization, and several other women's groups, signed a letter dated May 7 requesting that red flag measures be removed from the bill. In their place, you said that the proper use of existing mechanisms in the system, such as the person of interest criterion in connection with firearms, should be encouraged. For example, members of the community, including health professionals, should be encouraged to report any red flag situation.

A little earlier, I asked Dr. Kapur about Anastasia's law, a Quebec statute that you are probably familiar with. It allows health professionals to report any situation, as soon as they have suspicions. Do you think that the presence across Canada of that kind of legislative measure could be more beneficial than red flag measures like the ones included in Bill C-21?

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Yes indeed.

If we want to protect victims of domestic or family violence, then there has to be a safety net for them. Family and friends have responsibilities, and professionals even more so. However, the latter should not be placed in a situation which they believe clashes with their duty of confidentiality.

I therefore think that the act should clearly ask professionals who have concerns to report a mental health problem or violent behaviour to the chief firearms officer or the police. That would certainly help many victims.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: My colleague Ms. Damoff raised the interesting scenario of a police officer's wife subjected to violence by her husband.

Section 36 of the bill says that "If a chief firearms officer determines that an individual who holds a licence has engaged in an act of domestic violence or stalking, the chief firearms officer must revoke the licence." An exception, however, would allow an individual to obtain a conditional licence if the individual establishes to the satisfaction of the chief firearms officer that "the revocation constitutes a virtual prohibition against employment in the only vocation open to the individual." That would mean police officers could benefit from this exception because the weapon is needed for their work.

Some groups have asked that this exemption in the bill be removed so that even professionals who need a weapon can have their licence revoked.

What do you think about that, Ms. Riendeau?

After that I would also like Ms. Martin and Ms. MacDougall to answer my question.

Ms. Louise Riendeau: We think that people's safety is more important than employment. There are not many people who are only capable of doing one particular type of job in life.

We are indeed in favour of removing this exemption. A police or security officer ought to be above suspicion. Having a weapon is a privilege. As we have seen, police officers can terrorize their spouses, who then feel caught in a trap because they have the impression that no one will believe them and that the system will not respond.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Ms. Martin, I think that you alluded to this earlier. I believe that you're in agreement with Ms. Riendeau, but please add something if you wish.

Ms. Lise Martin: Yes, of course.

My view is that there is no reason or circumstance that should make employment a determining factor.

Recently in Gatineau there was a case of domestic violence for which the accused admitted his guilt, but the judge determined that he should not have a criminal record so that he could keep his job.

That's unacceptable, and is indicative of the lack of understanding with respect to domestic or family violence in Canada, which has an impact on society and on many families.

• (2020)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you very much.

Ms. MacDougall, do you have anything to add?

[English]

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: I think it's really important that we recognize that police have so much power and that there is a disproportionate amount of domestic violence within families of law enforcement officers.

We as an organization are one of the few organizations in the country that have a specific program for victims of police-involved domestic violence. We see dozens of victims from all across the country. The weapon is definitely used in terms of coercive control, the weapon in the house and the way that the abusive partner uses the weapon to maintain power and control and to terrorize, both in the sense of while the relationship is in effect but also when the survivor leaves.

It is quite concerning to us, if this remains in the bill and if there isn't action taken on this specifically to recognize the fact that gun ownership is a privilege, that it is not something that should given...and that it should be revoked 100% when we're talking about law enforcement.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, ladies.

[English]

We have Mr. MacGregor, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to also echo my colleagues around this table in thanking all three of you for appearing today and helping guide our committee through this study of this piece of legislation.

I think we've heard you very well on the concerns you've raised on the red flag provisions of this law. I think, similar to what Mr. Lloyd was saying, that the existing avenues that we have open to people who are experiencing domestic violence.... We need to focus efforts on improving those already existing lines, and that might be the preferable route for us as parliamentarians rather than adding a new system.

Ms. Martin, maybe I can start with you.

We've heard of concerns that many people might have in contacting the police. Can you also tell us the experience that many women have with the court system? It, too, is a pretty formidable system to go through. It can be quite intimidating. We know it's quite overburdened in many areas.

Do you have any thoughts on that? If we are to add a system whereby someone goes through the court system to get an emergency prohibition order, that could also be quite a daunting task.

Ms. Lise Martin: Yes, I think it is a well-known fact that the court system is very burdensome. It's a heavy system. We know that different provinces are taking different measures to address this, as in Quebec in the last year. Maybe Louise can speak more directly to that specific court system to try to address this.

Within our preoccupation with the national action plan is also to ensure that the systems in place are the same across the country and that the levels of services and protections available to women and their children do not depend on their postal code. That is the case today.

We have seen many times how there have been bad decisions that have impacted very negatively on specific families. There is also the impact it has on other victims of violence, in terms of decisions taken by judges who were not properly informed about the impacts of domestic violence on children, for example. For this whole piece of training of judges, part of it is training federal judges, but it's just as important to train provincial judges.

In all of this, when we're talking about gender-based violence, to me we can't keep on passing the buck or throwing the ball and saying that it's the feds or it's the provinces.... We're talking about people's lives here. This is an issue that impacts us as a society. We really need to address it together and make sure there is coordination, clear definition, implementation and accountability.

● (2025)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I'll invite Ms. Riendeau and Ms. MacDougall to also comment on that last question.

I had heard mention that you wanted the definition of "protection order" contained within the act and not left to regulations. Can you just repeat specifically what you're looking for us to insert as a definition? I just want to make sure I didn't miss it.

I'm not sure which of the three of you spoke about that in your opening remarks. I think it might have been you, Ms. MacDougall.

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: I think it's the definitions of "domestic violence" and "family violence" that we need to see in the act, and we need to draw on that definition that already exists within the Divorce Act. That would be an important piece.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Ms. Riendeau, do you have any other comments you'd like to add to this?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: A definition of "protection order" broad enough to include all types of orders, whether provincial or under the Criminal Code, needs to be included.

To return to your question about the court, even if research has shown that domestic violence continues after a separation and that there are repercussions on the children who experience it, many judges appear to ignore such facts. There is therefore no guarantee that going to court to request the revocation of a licence to possess a firearm would be any more effective than speaking to the police, because they would rely on the same criteria.

Absolutely everyone needs training on domestic violence, on the risks of the presence of weapons in such situations and on the need to take these risks seriously to prevent the deaths of women and children resulting from domestic violence.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

That's it for me, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We're going to our second round. We'll have to shoehorn it in to get it done, so we're going to cut down the Liberals and Conservatives to four minutes each and the NDP and the Bloc to two minutes each.

With that, I welcome Mrs. Kramp-Neuman to our committee.

Please go ahead for four minutes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The reality is that domestic violence and gender-based violence in rural and urban settings can be next door to any of us. It can be anyone's neighbour. I'd like to begin by thanking our witnesses for their time and advocacy. Physical violence, verbal violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and socio-economic violence.... I get it, and it's extremely difficult. Again, thank you.

For my first question, I'll start with Ms. Martin.

A significant number of women's organizations oppose the ex parte red flag measure, which invites victims to go to court themselves to have firearms removed from their abusers. If you could be so kind, please explain why you oppose this measure and what we, as legislators, can do to bridge the gap in this regard.

If you'd like to start, and then allow the others to entertain the question as well, that would be great. Thank you.

Ms. Lise Martin: I think Louise explained quite well the preoccupations or the reservations that exist in terms of the red flag part of the act. I think this is a technicality. I'm not sure whether I said in my brief I that oppose it, although I agree with the brief submitted by the National Association of Women and the Law, which has had more time to consider this.

Having said that, I think we need to take into account measures for certain groups of people who are not comfortable for many justifiable reasons. Certain groups that we haven't mentioned are new immigrant and refugee women to the country who may not feel comfortable going to the police, as well as racialized women.

My concern is ambiguity. We have to make sure there is no ambiguity in the bill. I think this needs to be further considered.

I'll pass it on to Louise and Angela.

● (2030)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I believe that the current system, in which you can contact either the police or the office of the chief firearms officer, is a good one. It could be improved, however, and that's perhaps why some effort is required. It's important to ensure that all requests are taken seriously and that victims have clear options. The fact that the office of the chief firearms officer is separate from the local police can help some women.

Sending out more information about how the system works is also important. It's not as simple as just knowing where to telephone to report the situation. So those who administer these measures need more training, and there has to be more public information to ensure that victims or others who may be concerned know whom to call. This would greatly facilitate the lives of people trying to protect themselves via these measures.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. MacDougall, do you want to weigh in on this?

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Yes, please.

There are so many things that a victim or survivor has to do when they enter into the system. There are so many considerations that they have in the sense of their safety, their children's safety, employment and just managing the day to day. So many survivors don't have the benefit of an advocate and are navigating the system alone.

Though the intention of the red flag is good, it creates potential conditions that put an unreasonable burden on a victim or survivor to address their safety. We've discussed this a bit so far. When that happens and we create that kind of opening, where the survivor is somehow responsible for their safety, the system orients itself in that way and begins to question whether the victim has done everything she should have done, based on the interpretation.

There's a lot of work to be done already, just in terms of the amount of victim blaming that exists. The red flag, although I think the intentions are solid, creates another potential loophole and a chasm in which survivors can find themselves without an advocate and without understanding how to navigate the system. They are then blamed if they are not following through in the ways in which the system thinks they should with respect to this measure—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm going to have to cut you off there. I'm sorry.

Thank you, Ms. Kramp-Neuman.

We go now to Mr. Schiefke for four minutes.

Go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by thanking Ms. Riendeau for her outstanding work at Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale. In my riding, Vaudreuil—Soulanges, there is a group called Hébergement La Passerelle that does remarkable work. On their behalf and from all citizens in my community, thank you.

[English]

I would like to say the same to you, Ms. Martin, and to you, Ms. MacDougall, for your exceptional work.

In a brief submitted by the Canadian Women's Foundation to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in May 2018, they highlighted the fact that, "In Canadian households, the presence of firearms in the home is the single greatest risk factor for lethality of domestic violence." It's something that overwhelmingly impacts women, because 80% of those killed by intimate partner violence are women.

Ms. Martin, I appreciate the statistics you gave in your opening remarks that showed that this actually increased since 2019 and I appreciate your sharing that with us.

I also want to thank all three of you for sharing your amendments and the changes you suggested in your opening remarks.

What I'm hoping you can do—and I'm going to give you each 45 seconds to a minute to do this—is to touch upon one or two aspects of this bill that are going to make a difference. A witness who appeared this morning said that this will do nothing at all to combat violence against women and violence related to guns in Canada. Based on your experience and your expertise, if you could choose one or two things in this bill that you know will make a difference, what would those be and why?

I don't know who to start with.

Perhaps I'll start with you, Ms. MacDougall. I see you nodding your head, and I apologize for putting you on the spot.

● (2035)

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Not at all.

This is the dilemma, isn't it? We have so many opportunities to address gender-based violence, domestic violence, and we have yet to move in a fulsome way. The national action plan that Women's Shelters Canada has advocated for 10 years is a road map for getting to the root causes, building services, building prevention and addressing legal issues. Overall, that is a really key, important intervention that we should move wholeheartedly into.

This piece around the legislation is important. However, it is a small sliver of the bigger picture. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Ms. MacDougall.

I'll turn it over to Ms. Martin.

Ms. Lise Martin: It is known that the sale of firearms has increased significantly in the last decade. For that reason alone, we need to address firearms. There needs to be more control.

The section about revoking a licence, I do believe, will make a difference.

I will slip in here the importance of sustaining the sector as well, because it is so important—as Angela was just stating earlier—in terms of the multiple steps that women need to go through when they are finally able to escape a situation. The sector plays a very important role in ensuring that safety, and I think this bill is part of a larger continuum. It's not one piece; it's—

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Ms. Martin.

I'll give the last word to Madame Riendeau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: To keep all victims of domestic violence safe, all parts of the safety net have to work. All the various measures need to mesh tightly together. If there is a protection order, revocation of a licence needs to be considered. If there has been violence or suspected violence, licence revocation once again needs to be considered. It's important to ensure that there are no loopholes that would enable spouses to continue to terrorize victims and their children, or even kill them.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schiefke.

We're going to finish off with Madame Michaud.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for two minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Martin, you mentioned how long it can take to revoke a licence. It may be somewhat more technical, but in clause 41, Bill C-21 amends section 89 of the Firearms Act to require the competent authority to advise the chief firearms officer without delay when it makes, varies or revokes a protection order. Some groups have pointed out that the expression “without delay” is somewhat vague and doesn't mean much, and have suggested setting a specific time period, like 24 hours.

Does this proposal strike you as reasonable? What's your opinion?

After that, I would like to hear Ms. Riendeau's point of view.

Ms. Lise Martin: Yes, it seems altogether reasonable to me. I think there should also be consequences if it's not complied with.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Ms. Riendeau, I see that you're nodding.

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I fully agree. The information has to be provided quickly.

In fact, if a violent spouse who intends to harm his family is allowed too much time, he can become a time bomb and end up acting out. I believe 24 hours is appropriate.

Similarly, if a licence is revoked, the owner of a firearm should be required to turn it into a peace officer within 24 hours, unless there are special circumstances that make this impossible.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

To conclude, I asked you to provide the committee with a list of suggested amendments if you had any, but I heard you say that you were completely in agreement with the amendments proposed by groups like PolySeSouvient.

This group did indeed give us a helpful list of suggested amendments designed to provide more protection to victims of stalking or domestic violence, and the committee is pleased to be able to work with them to try and improve Bill C-21 wherever possible.

Thank you for your time this evening, and your testimony.

● (2040)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Louise Riendeau: The National Association of Women and the Law has also done some excellent work in its proposed amendments.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: That's great. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

The witnesses are advised that they can submit to the clerk any contribution they like of that nature. It will be translated as appropriate and distributed to the committee.

That brings our meeting tonight to a close. I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for sharing their valuable time and experience with us and for helping us with our study. Thank you all.

We are now adjourned.

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