



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Family Violence Reforms Bill 2026

October 2026



INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE

About TasCOSS

TasCOSS's vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania; and to challenge and change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to Tasmanians on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Key Issues Needing Reform	5
Definition and scope of family violence	5
Coercive control	5
Improving protections for victim-survivors living in rental properties	6
Conclusion	7
Recommendations	8

Introduction

TasCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the *Family Violence Reforms Bill 2026* ‘(the Bill).’

TasCOSS supports the submission made by Council on the Ageing (COTA) Tasmania to this consultation and, in particular, its call for Tasmania’s definition and scope of family violence to be broadened. In addition, TasCOSS provides detailed comments on two proposed reforms, which are particularly relevant to the experiences of Tasmanians experiencing poverty and disadvantage: the new coercive control offence and improved protections for victim-survivors living in rental properties.

Key Issues Needing Reform

Definition and scope of family violence

TasCOSS supports COTA Tasmania's call for the definition and scope of family violence in the *Family Violence Act 2004* to be expanded to better reflect the range of relationships in which violence and abuse can occur.

As COTA Tasmania highlights, Tasmania's legislative framework remains largely centred on violence within current or former spouse or significant intimate partner relationships. This excludes violence and abuse occurring in relationships involving adult children and parents, grandparents and grandchildren, siblings and extended family, kinship relationships, and relevant care and dependency relationships.

TasCOSS agrees with COTA Tasmania that the relationship between the victim-survivor and the person causing harm should not result in people experiencing comparable forms of violence having unequal access to recognition and protection. This is particularly important in relation to elder abuse but has broader relevance to ensuring Tasmania's family violence framework responds equitably to the diversity of families and caring relationships in our community.

TasCOSS therefore supports COTA Tasmania's recommendation that definitional reform be treated as a foundational priority within the Tasmanian Government's family violence reform program, including recognition of intergenerational and wider family violence.

Coercive control

TasCOSS supports the intention of the Bill to better recognise and respond to coercive control.

The proposed reforms recognise that family violence is not necessarily a series of discrete incidents. Coercive control can involve a pattern of behaviours which, cumulatively, restrict a person's autonomy and independence. The Bill expressly recognises restrictions on access to basic necessities, support services, property, justice and participation in economic and social life as potential coercive or controlling impacts.

This is particularly significant from the perspective of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Economic insecurity can both increase vulnerability to coercive control and make it substantially harder for a victim-survivor to leave an unsafe relationship. Control over money, housing, transport, employment, social security, essential services or access to support can have profound consequences for a person who has few alternative resources available to them.

TasCOSS therefore supports the Bill's move towards recognising the cumulative effect and broader context of behaviour when determining whether conduct constitutes coercive control.

However, the effectiveness of the new offence will depend heavily on its implementation. In particular, TasCOSS is concerned about the potential for victim-survivors to be misidentified as perpetrators, including where their behaviour is defensive or reactive to a broader pattern of abuse.

TasCOSS recommends that implementation of the new offence be accompanied by comprehensive and ongoing training for police, prosecutors, judicial officers and other relevant professionals. Training should support identification of the predominant aggressor and understanding of economic abuse, systems abuse and the ways poverty and disadvantage can affect a victim-survivor's choices and responses.

Implementation should also be monitored and independently reviewed, with the experiences of victim-survivors and specialist family violence and community service organisations central to that review.

Improving protections for victim-survivors living in rental properties

TasCOSS strongly supports the proposed amendment to section 7 of the *Family Violence Act 2004* to recognise damage to property rented or ordinarily occupied by a victim-survivor or affected child as family violence.

As the consultation fact sheet acknowledges, the existing provision primarily focuses on owner-occupied property. The proposed amendment recognises that victim-survivors and children living in rental accommodation can experience the same forms of property-related abuse and would ensure protection does not depend on the legal ownership of a person's home.

This is an important reform from an equity perspective. A person's protection from family violence should not depend on whether they have the financial means to own their home.

For victim-survivors who rent, damage caused by a perpetrator can also have consequences extending well beyond the immediate act of violence. Property damage may place a tenancy at risk, create debts or disputes about liability, affect a person's ability to secure another rental property and compound existing financial insecurity. These impacts can be particularly severe for people on low incomes where safe, secure and affordable alternative housing is difficult to obtain.

TasCOSS therefore supports the proposed amendment and recommends that its implementation be considered alongside the broader protections available to victim-survivors under Tasmania's residential tenancy and housing systems. Victim-survivors should not experience financial or housing disadvantage because of damage caused by a perpetrator of family violence.

This includes ensuring victim-survivors have accessible mechanisms to address liability for family violence-related property damage and can obtain timely tenancy, legal and financial assistance, where needed. It also reinforces the importance of adequate investment in crisis accommodation, rapid rehousing, social housing and other pathways to safe and secure housing for victim-survivors who cannot safely remain in their existing home.

Conclusion

TasCOSS supports the overall direction of the *Family Violence Reforms Bill 2026* and the submission made by COTA Tasmania.

In particular, TasCOSS supports COTA Tasmania's call for the definition and scope of family violence to be expanded so that people experiencing comparable forms of violence have equitable access to recognition and protection, regardless of the family relationship in which that violence occurs. COTA Tasmania identifies this as a fundamental gap in the current framework.

TasCOSS also strongly supports reforms which recognise coercive control as a pattern of behaviour and extend protections relating to property damage to people living in rental accommodation. These reforms better reflect the realities of family violence and have particular significance for Tasmanians experiencing poverty, housing insecurity and other forms of disadvantage.

TasCOSS encourages the Government to ensure these legislative reforms are accompanied by appropriate safeguards, workforce training, monitoring and investment in the specialist family violence, legal, housing and community services that victim-survivors need to achieve safety and independence.

Recommendations

TasCOSS recommends the Tasmanian Government:

1. **Expand the definition and scope of family violence in the *Family Violence Act 2004* to recognise violence and abuse occurring across a broader range of family and family-like relationships**, and treat this as a foundational priority within the broader family violence reform program.
2. **Implement the proposed coercive control reforms and ensure they are accompanied by appropriate implementation safeguards**, including comprehensive and ongoing training for police, prosecutors, judicial officers and other relevant professionals on coercive control, economic and systems abuse, predominant aggressor identification, and the role of poverty and disadvantage in victim-survivors' choices and responses.
3. **Implement the proposed expansion of protections for victim-survivors living in rental properties**, and ensure victim-survivors are not left financially or legally responsible for property damage caused by perpetrators of family violence or placed at increased risk of housing insecurity as a consequence of that damage.
4. **Ensure all the reforms are adequately resourced and their impacts monitored**, including through investment in specialist family violence, legal, tenancy, housing and community services, appropriate data collection, and review of implementation informed by the experiences of victim-survivors and specialist family violence and community service organisations.