

LEGAL BULLETIN

Issue No. 56

Mobility and Coercive Control in Parenting Law: *Laurence v Ross*, 2025 ABKB 131

Introduction

This bulletin considers the Alberta Court of King’s Bench decision in *Laurence v Ross*,¹ which involved a mother’s application to relocate a child from Calgary, Alberta, to Paspébiac, Quebec.² The central issue was whether relocation was in the child’s best interests, considering allegations of family violence and the father’s opposition to the move.³ The Court ultimately granted the mother’s application, recognizing the child’s need for long-term stability with the primary parent.⁴

This case is significant because it recognized that the definition of “family violence” in the Alberta Family Law Act includes “coercive control”, and because it recognized the harm of coercive control on children, even where children are not the target of violence.



Case Background

The parties, Myrienne Ross (Mother) and Yanick Laurence (Father), cohabited from January 2015 until their separation in August 2024.⁵ They had one child, aged five, who was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta.⁶ After separation the Mother withheld the child after learning of the Father’s extensive criminal record. A temporary parenting order was made. The Father then breached the order by failing to return the child. The Mother brought an urgent motion, which resulted in the

Father’s parenting time be supervised.

The Mother accepted a job in Paspébiac, Quebec, where she was born and raised and where her extended family continued to reside. She brought an application to relocate the child to Paspébiac. The Father opposed the relocation and sought shared parenting in Calgary.⁷ The court described the parties’ litigation as “high conflict”.⁸

¹ 2025 ABKB 131.

² Ibid at paras 2, 6.

³ Ibid at paras 2, 116.

⁴ Ibid at paras 2, 8, 209.

⁵ Ibid at para 12.

⁶ Ibid at para 13.

⁷ Ibid at paras 2, 14.

⁸ Ibid at para 16.

Family Violence and Best Interests

In support of her mobility application, the Mother argued that the Father engaged in several incidents of psychological and financial abuse as well as coercive control. While the Mother did not allege physical violence, she testified to an incident where the Father threw a plate on the ground in front of the Mother and the child.

Family violence is one factor a court will consider on a relocation application under Alberta's *Family Law Act* (FLA). However, the FLA does not include coercive control in its definition of family violence. As a result,

it is narrower than the federal *Divorce Act* which does include coercive control. The court held that the definition of family violence in the FLA was not exhaustive, and that the more expansive definition of family violence in the *Divorce Act* could be adopted in matters that fell under the FLA.

The court accepted that the Father had engaged in coercive and controlling behaviour towards the Mother and that this negatively impacted the child. This was true even though none of the Father's actions were directed towards harming the child.

Ruling and Parenting Plan

The Court granted the Mother's mobility application, allowing her to relocate the child to Paspébiac, Quebec.⁹ The Mother was also awarded sole decision-making responsibility over the child.¹⁰ Given the Father's history of coercive control, disrespect for authority, and the court's concern about the

Father potentially withholding the child, the Father's parenting time, excluding regular video calls, was to be supervised. The supervision order would remain in place until a psychiatric assessment could be completed about the risks of the Father having unsupervised time with the child.¹¹

⁹ Ibid at paras 2, 216(1).

¹⁰ Ibid at paras 213, 216(2), 216(3).

¹¹ Ibid at paras 195, 212.

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