

Crime-solving reward tripled

\$150,000 available to anyone who helps solve one of 51 major crimes

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Nova Scotia is hoping bigger cash rewards will help authorities close the book on dozens of major unsolved crimes.

Justice Minister Cecil Clarke announced Thursday the province is tripling the reward — to \$150,000 — for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for any of 51 crimes.

"There is concern that for someone to take the risk of pro-

viding information that the current level of \$50,000 may not be enough for someone who has to potentially look at adjusting (their lives) or maybe even moving," Mr. Clarke said after cabinet.

No rewards have been paid out since the program was launched in October 2006.

The Justice Department said a case will now remain in the program until the police ask for it to be removed, ending the previous system's use of expiry dates.

"Solving these major crimes is essential to ensuring the public

maintains its faith in the criminal justice system," Supt. Blair McKnight, the RCMP officer in charge of criminal operations in Nova Scotia, said in a news release.

"We hope this increased commitment by the Department of Justice leads to information being revealed that causes criminals to be held accountable for the pain they have caused."

Chief Frank Beazley of Halifax Regional Police said even a seemingly insignificant detail can help solve a case.

"It is our hope that this increase in the award being offered will give people further incentive to come forward with that one missing piece of the puzzle

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that would allow police to further their investigation," he said in the release.

Lynn Gallant-Blackburn said she was "thrilled beyond words" by Thursday's announcement. She lost her sister, Timberlea teacher Paula Gallant, in an unsolved murder in December 2005.

She said the boost in reward money could make a difference.

"I don't think \$50,000 is enough to entice somebody to come forward with information. When you have to involve yourself in a murder and you have to be part of a trial and be subject to that, I think when people weigh that decision, they'd rather not get involved."

Ms. Gallant-Blackburn, who lives in the Hammonds Plains area outside Halifax, met with Justice Department officials earlier this year to push for an increase in the reward money and to put an end to expiry dates in the program. She said she found it emotionally difficult to have to have her sister's case qualify for the program year after year.

She said if the increased money leads to a conviction in any murder — not just her sister's — she'd feel a great victory.

"If the recommendations that we've put forward through our learnings from Paula's murder either help solve another crime and end the pain and put closure on another family's grief, that would give purpose to Paula's death."

She's pleased that someone from the Justice Department contacted her family before the change was announced publicly.

"It shows that they're becoming a little bit more compassionate and empathetic in communicating these messages to the families first."

Despite the announcement, Ms. Gallant-Blackburn intends to keep pushing the Justice Department for more change.

She'd like to see a better support system for victims' families. For example, she thinks there should be an increase in the counselling cap, which is now \$2,000 per person, and the bureaucracy surrounding the program should be streamlined. She sees inconsistencies in how the counselling money is awarded.

"That whole program has to be overhauled. If it means the government ... puts more investment in healing victims than it does in healing perpetrators, that would be a good day."

She said Thursday's announcement shows that leaders are listening.

"It's a good day for Paula."

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