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## Oak Bay murder-suicide triggers training overhaul

Police, prosecutors to take part in program on domestic violence

**Rob Shaw**

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B.C.'s police and prosecutors will receive new domestic violence training, in the wake of a 2007 murder-suicide in Oak Bay, the government announced yesterday.

Solicitor General Kash Heed unveiled a new set of provincewide rules intended to gauge the risk of serious violence in cases of spousal abuse, and determine if it's safe to release the person accused on bail.

The 10 risk factors, such as a history of threats, escalating violence, sexual violence, criminal activity, substance abuse, mental health issues or financial problems, will be used by police officers to assess the safety of victims and family members.

Crown prosecutors then use that information to help decide what charges to lay, and what restrictions to ask of a judge during bail hearings. Earlier this year, the province announced strict new standardized bail conditions for anyone considered high risk.

"This is one of the most important pieces of the puzzle that we're putting together," said Heed.

"We've learned from the unfortunate [murder] of Christian Lee, and from some of the other cases that are out there. This tool, coupled with training, coupled with policy, coupled with bail conditions, will lead to a more effective way of dealing with these offenders."

The number of domestic violence cases rose nine per cent last year compared to 2008, the government said.

Training is set to begin by November for senior police officers, such as those in Greater Victoria's newly formed regional domestic violence unit.

The changes are the latest response to criticism arising out of the Oak Bay murder-suicide.

Peter Lee stabbed to death his six-year-old son Christian, his wife Sunny Park, and her parents Kum Lea Chun and Moon Kyu Park at their Oak Bay home on Sept. 4, 2007. Then he took his own life.

Five weeks earlier, Lee had crashed the family vehicle into a utility pole in

what Park told police was a deliberate attempt to kill her. Despite police concerns, Lee was granted bail and went on to murder his family.

Both a coroner's jury and B.C.'s representative for children and youth argued the lack of co-ordination between the criminal justice and child welfare systems contributed to the deaths.

Although Park had complained about spousal abuse, she was bounced among three local police departments, Crown prosecutors, therapists and lawyers, none of whom identified the imminent danger.

Children's representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond was unavailable for comment yesterday.

Organizations that support victims of relationship violence expressed cautious approval for the government announcement.

"These are all things we and others have been recommending for quite some time so we're very happy to see the province moving in this direction," said Tracy Porteous, executive director of the Ending Violence Association of B.C. "We'd just like to see more."

In particular, she said she'd like to see Crown prosecutors dedicated to domestic violence cases. Instead, the province said it will train about 40 Crown -- one from each office -- so they act as a resource for other colleagues.

The government also discounted Turpel-Lafond's suggestion of a specialized B.C. domestic violence court. Instead, it said it will work to improve the existing court system.

The new training will be funded by a one-time allocation of \$250,000 from the province's civil forfeiture fund.

No long-term annual funding was announced.

Even though the government is cutting almost all ministry budgets as part of a \$1.7-billion deficit this year, Heed said he will not reduce the almost \$54 million spent annually on violence-against-women programs, transition houses and victim employment assistance.

A new government secretariat will oversee the completion dates for the provincial changes, most of which are slated for later this year.

Meanwhile, a domestic violence death review panel by B.C.'s Coroners Service is set to report its findings by May 14.

rfshaw@tc.canwest.com

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