

Nicole O'Reilly Thu Jan 10 2013 06:46:32 6 Recommend

## Officer probed for alleged tryst with witness

**Sergeant Derek Mellor, lead human trafficking investigator, has been suspended from duty**

A 19-year-old former sex worker who is a witness in a human trafficking case has accused the lead Hamilton police investigator of an inappropriate sexual relationship with her. Those allegations have led to an ongoing internal investigation and fears among advocates that criminal cases may now be tainted.

Sergeant Derek Mellor, a 14-year veteran Hamilton police officer, has been suspended since mid-December. He was the service's first dedicated human trafficking investigator.

Sources say another officer who was aware of the allegations is also under investigation for not immediately coming forward with the information, and a senior supervising officer has been moved to another unit.

The allegations are only under investigation, and no criminal or police services charges have been laid.

Mellor did not return calls for comment.

Bonnie Davidson, of Because She Matters — a support group for sex trafficking victims — said when the young woman told her what had happened in late November, she went to police. The officer who took the complaint then reported the allegations to his superiors, launching the internal investigation.

"The trust between the girls and police is very important because police are often their lifeline and only objective help," Davidson said.

She called this case a "tragedy," but said it should not take away from the wonderful work of other Hamilton officers who are involved with human trafficking cases.

Davidson said she's aware of a handful of other women, mostly sex trade informants or front-line workers trying to help the women, who have also complained to police about alleged inappropriate advances.

In an emailed statement, Hamilton police spokesperson Catherine Martin said "ongoing internal investigations must be kept confidential and the (Police Services) Act strictly prohibits commentary."

She added that the service takes any allegation of misconduct very seriously, launching an internal investigation and, when necessary, suspending the accused officer. These investigations can lead to Police Services Act disciplinary charges or criminal charges.

Martin's statement was in response to a Spectator request for an interview with police Chief Glenn De Caire.

The one-man human trafficking team began with Mellor in July 2011, thanks to a \$159,900 provincial grant. That funding wasn't renewed for 2013.

**MORE: Province helps police tackle human trafficking crimes** (<http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/565243--province-helps-police-tackle-human-trafficking-crimes>)

Martin said Hamilton police will "continue to investigate incidents of human trafficking and these investigations are assigned to the most appropriate detective unit."

Victim advocates are fearful of the impact on Mellor's outstanding court cases and how human trafficking cases will be investigated in the future.

Timea Nagy, who runs the human trafficking victim rescue agency Walk With Me, said she is aware of the investigation, but not directly involved.

She said she worries about the impact this investigation could have on human trafficking cases before the courts if Mellor can't be involved and his credibility is questioned. She also worries the turmoil could affect support among police for rescuing human trafficking victims.

Sex trafficking is rampant in Hamilton and there are many girls and women who need help, she said.

"We can't let one bad apple spoil the work being done," Nagy said, adding she has worked with countless other "fantastic" police in Hamilton and other Ontario cities.

She argues it should never have been set up as a one-person unit, first because there is a need for more investigators and also because that way, possible inappropriate behaviour wouldn't go unnoticed.

Since its inception, the human trafficking unit has laid more than 100 charges, including human trafficking charges against six people. These cases largely involved vulnerable young girls or women lured by pimps and sold for sex through online classified sites.

Mellor, who is in his late 30s, was a drug investigator before beginning with human trafficking.

In earlier interviews with The Spectator, he often spoke passionately about his work and great need for sex trafficking investigators in Hamilton.

In a March 2012 story, he spoke about the difficulty in getting the vulnerable women to trust police. He said it was more about protecting the victims he worked with than laying charges.



Hamilton's Central Police Station

Hamilton Spectator file photo

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