

# Christopher's Law will come into effect Monday

*Sex offender registry expected to be a valuable investigative tool for Halton Regional Police*

By **TIM WHITNELL**

*Special to The Champion*

Keeping tabs on the whereabouts of sex offenders in Milton and the rest of Halton will become easier with the imminent passage of new legislation, say Halton Regional Police.

However, the public shouldn't expect to have access to the information or for police to habitually publicize the addresses of those living in the region with convictions for sex-related crimes.

On Monday, the Ontario legislature is

expected to enact Christopher's Law, a tool that will enable law enforcement agencies in the province to compile the names, most recent addresses and photographs of individuals convicted of sexual offences in Canada.

All people serving such a sentence on the day the law comes into force or convicted of a sex offence on or after that day, will be subject to mandatory registration.

The pending law is named for Christopher Stephenson. The 11-year-old Brampton boy was murdered in 1988 by convicted pedophile Joseph Fredericks, who was out of jail on mandatory supervision at the time of the killing. It was five years before a coroner's jury made a slew of recommendations to avoid such tragedies, the most significant suggestion being the creation of a national registry for sex offenders.

The law isn't Canada-wide, but Det. Insp. Signy Pittman, head of Halton police's criminal investigations branch, said Halton police are ready to apply the new regulations.

"It's a wonderful investigative tool," she said. "When we as investigators hear of someone (with a history of sex crimes) come into our community we track them — but we can't be aware of all of them."

The new law should make it easier to track such individuals, she said. "The registry will be more sophisticated. It will allow us to do a number of different searches, by name, address..."

It's expected to be a marked improvement on the current search system, the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC), which can't always provide a current address and doesn't include an offender's photo.

Det. Insp. Pittman said she doesn't know how many convicted sex offenders currently reside in Halton but she guessed about 100. Offenders who fail to comply with registration requirements face a fine of up to \$25,000 and/or up to two years in jail. The kind of sex offences that require individuals to register with local police departments and report annually for new photos runs the gamut from people convicted of touching with a sexual connotation to exposure to incest to aggravated sexual assault.

Anyone convicted of a sex crime and sentenced to less than 10 years remains on the registry for 10 years. A sentence of more than 10 years or two sex-related convictions means the individual stays on the registry for life.

As for the public's ability to find out who is on the list and where they live, it's not likely to happen, said Det. Insp. Pittman.

There has long been a process that allows police to release the information to the public but it is rarely invoked.

"The Police Services Act speaks to the disclosure of information. The chief or his designate could disclose personal information if the individual poses a significant risk of harm to people or property," said Pittman.

"Many of these people, who may be high-risk offenders, are traditionally under some sort of judicial condition already like parole or a report order, which allows us to check up on them."

Just because they're on the registry doesn't mean police will be contacting the individual though if a sex crime is committed in Halton, she said. "That's not to say everyone on the registry is automatically a suspect in any case."

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