

B.C. restores \$440,000 to domestic abuse budget after critical children's report

By Dirk Meissner

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VICTORIA — The cash-strapped B.C. government says it will restore almost \$440,000 in funding to protect frontline services for victims of domestic violence just days after a critical report from the provincial children's representative.

Solicitor General Kash Heed announced Tuesday that his ministry will restore the \$440,000 cut from his ministry, because the earlier cuts would have harmed domestic abuse protection services.

The ministry also agreed to extend \$11,000 in funding for

a victim services worker in the New Westminster Police Department's domestic violence unit.

Funding for the position was slated to end in December, but it has now been extended until at least March 2010.

He said he restored the cuts after ministry officials told him they would impact frontline services.

"I realize the importance of these services," said Heed.

Heed said domestic violence units have proven effective tools in fighting domestic violence, and having a victim services worker embedded in the unit ensures victims get immediately needed support.

The reversal comes less than a week after B.C.'s children's watchdog, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, released her report into the death of six-year-old Christian Lee, who died at the hands of his father in a family murder-suicide two years ago. Peter Lee was under court order at the time stay away from his wife.

His wife, Sunny Park, was stabbed 49 times and Christian was stabbed repeatedly before his father turned the weapon on himself after the September 2007 murders. He also stabbed to death Park's parents, Kum Lea Chun and Moon Kyu Park.

The report called on the government to develop a co-ordinated approach to com-

bat domestic violence, saying there have been 70 domestic violence-linked murders in the past five years.

Turpel-Lafond called on the Solicitor General's Ministry to take a lead role in a government initiative to protect children and youth from domestic violence.

She said Tuesday she was pleased Heed restored the funding to fight domestic violence, but more needs to be done.

Her report made five recommendations that will require more government money to ensure the province builds a co-ordinated legal, social and government response to domestic violence.

Heed's previous experi-

ence as a police officer has given him some of the tools necessary to ensure domestic violence receives the attention it deserves and offers more protection for potential victims, especially children, she said.

"I would say that he's probably to only person around that (cabinet) table that has had to go knock on the door and deal with the situation (of domestic violence), and as a result ... I think he has a fell for the issues," said Turpel-Lafond.

"Now that he's the Solicitor General, he's the lead, and he's going to have to show the leadership, and bringing some of the money back into the system is a positive sign

to me."

Turpel-Lafond delivered her annual report Tuesday, saying she will shortly release two major reports detailing deaths and injuries of B.C. children under two years and youth suicide.

The annual report noted that 14,500 children and youth in B.C. live outside their parental home. More than 60 per cent of them are in government care, and more than half of them aboriginal.

Just eight per cent of the B.C. child population is aboriginal, yet one in five will come in contact with the child welfare system.

"This is an astounding disparity," she wrote, and not unique to B.C.