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Suspect to challenge conditions

By Allison Morris

03/10/08

One of the men charged with the murder of reporter Martin O'Hagan is considering a legal challenge against the prison service after being held in a punishment cell since being remanded in custody last month.

Drew King (40) from Moss Road, Waringstown appeared in Craigavon Magistrates Court on September 24 charged with the murder of the Sunday World crime reporter.

Since then King has been held in the special secure unit (SSU) of Maghaberry prison.

Sources within the top security jail said staff are refusing to work on the same wing as the Lurgan loyalist who is currently in a relationship with a former prison officer.

Prison staff have complained that the 40-year-old could be in a position to compromise their personal safety because of his ongoing friendship with a female former prison officer.

Five people are facing charges in relation to the 2001 murder of Mr O'Hagan.

Drew King and two other men, Nigel Leckey (43) and Neil Hyde (28), are accused of murdering the 51-year-old reporter as he returned from a night out at a local pub.

Hyde is believed to have already agreed to give evidence against his co-accused and is being held in the hospital wing of the Co Down prison.

Leckey is also expected to give evidence against his former loyalist associates and is being held in isolation at the top-security jail for his own protection.

Leading Lurgan loyalist Robin King (42), a brother of Drew King, has been charged with attempting to pervert the course of justice by disposing of the getaway car used in the killing.

The only one of the four on bail, Mark Kennedy (28), is accused of helping to facilitate the disposal or concealment of the Subaru Impreza car used in the killing.

King's solicitor, Ciaran Shiels, a partner with Madden and Finucane solicitors, said they were in contact with the Northern Ireland Prison Service over the decision to hold their client on the punishment wing.

"We are in correspondence with the prison service in relation to this, Mr King should not be held in the prison punishment block," he said.

"Mr King is a remand prisoner, he has not been charged with any offence relating to a breach of prison discipline and does not face any adjudication procedure.

"We have asked the prison service to provide us with adequate reasons as to why he is being held in the secure punishment unit; failing that we will be considering legal action to challenge this decision."

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