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By Stephen Breen
Monday, 11 August 2008

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) was last night slammed over its failure to charge anyone with the murder of Belfast schoolboy Thomas Devlin.

North Down UUP MP Lady Sylvia Hermon is set to write to the PPS after the teenager's parents were told that files on three men and three women quizzed about the killing last year were not being processed.

The teenager was stabbed to death three years ago yesterday when he and two friends were walking along the Somerton Road in north Belfast.

Although one man has been charged with the attempted grievous bodily harm of the 15-year-old's friend, his parents, Penny Holloway and Jim Devlin, were left "deeply disappointed and upset" by the PPS' failure to bring anyone before the courts.

Former north Belfast MLA Billy Hutchinson, a member of the PUP and a

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former UVF lifer, was among seven people arrested by police investigating the murder last year. He was later released without charge.

What are these?

Lady Hermon, who has also backed the families of other murder victims in their fight for justice, has urged the PPS to reconsider its decision.

Speaking to the Belfast Telegraph, the UUP MP vowed to support the teenager's family in their row with the PPS. Said Lady Sylvia: "I'm horrified that the PPS has decided against any prosecution in this case and demand to know why.

"Why, in this day and age of DNA testing and other specialist forensic techniques, does the PPS believe there is not enough evidence to bring any charges against people who murdered an innocent child?

"I would also like to know why, if witnesses felt scared to testify in open court, they were not offered protection?"

Ms Holloway, who is set to raise the issue with Security Minister Paul Goggins, has now formally requested that the PPS' ruling be reviewed by an independent QC from England.

Lady Sylvia added: "We have put our faith in the justice system, but it has failed us to date. One man has been charged in relation to the attack on Thomas and his friends, but this is a very light charge. We expressed no confidence in the PPS in the early stages of the investigation and nothing has changed our opinion. The police have worked hard on the investigation and we know they are also unhappy with the PPS' direction."

A spokesman for the PPS confirmed no action was being taken against the suspects: "The director has agreed to undertake a review of the decision not to prosecute. The PPS has met the family of Thomas Devlin on a number of occasions over recent months. Furthermore, the PPS has written to the family in relation to concerns which they raised about the decision not to prosecute."

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