

Persons at risk now contacted when bail granted

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EDMONTON - Michael Butler's efforts to get more support for victims of crime have already led to at least one change.

Before his wife's death, Edmonton police internal policy required officers to notify only the spouse of an accused person released on bail, as long as no specific act of violence led to the arrest.

Now, any time a personal conflict leads to an arrest, any person at risk should be contacted if an accused is granted bail, according to a letter sent from police to Butler last July.

Butler lodged an official complaint with the Edmonton Police Commission last April after his brother, Ken, was released on bail and he was not notified.

Stephanie Butler was killed that same week. Ken Butler was charged with second-degree murder, and a trial has been ordered but a date still needs to be set.

Ken Butler was arrested earlier that week after Michael called police to report his brother was banging on his door, trying to get into his house.

Police took Ken into custody because he had outstanding warrants. He was released the next day on \$300 cash bail and the condition he stay away from his brother's house.

Police Insp. Jim Kennedy replied on July 30 to Michael Butler's complaint that he wasn't notified of his brother's release.

Now, when someone is arrested, the arresting officer can check off a box on the arrest form and enter the victim's contact information, so they will be automatically notified when the accused is released.

That process can be initiated at the victim's request or by the arresting officer, Kennedy said. "The officer may make a bit of a call in their minds when it's really a personal risk."

The change also means that the names of people potentially at risk will be linked to the name of an accused in the police electronic database.

When Butler meets with politicians, he tells his story and asks for two things: more flexibility for police to hold repeat and potentially violent offenders, and more social programs to help drug addicts and repeat offenders.

Butler wants to see Edmonton's drug court increased to a provincewide initiative, and wants better treatment programs for offenders in jail and more social housing.

"We need something better than a pilot project," he said.

"People are going to keep getting worse. How many murders have there been in the paper? It's mind-boggling."

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