

## **Proposed legislation to reduce the number of unresolved homicides and missing person cases in the State of Vermont.**

### **Rationale:**

This legislation is drafted to reduce the number of unresolved homicides and missing person cases in the State of Vermont and to establish an Unresolved Case Accountability (UCA) Task Force. Whereas there are currently approximately fifty-five (55) unsolved homicides in Vermont dating back to the 1950's and approximately thirty-five (35) missing person cases in Vermont that have been missing for more than 60 days, dating back to 1946. The list of unresolved cases is compiled by the Vermont State Police and is displayed on its website for public view.

In March of 2015, the Vermont State Police established a Major Crime Unit (MCU) to investigate the most serious crimes, specifically homicides and other complex investigations. MCU detectives are tasked with working on "cold cases", unresolved homicides and missing persons whenever possible. Since its inception, the MCU has investigated a total of 31 homicides and 5 officer involved shootings; and as a result MCU detectives have been unable to commit any significant investigative time and resources to unresolved cases.

Much of the work involved in unresolved cases begins with an extensive review, inventory and organization of "cold case" files and evidence. This work is meticulous, time consuming and is best completed by trained investigators who are familiar with this process. Unresolved cases could then be presented for review by a group of experts tasked with making recommendations in support of an investigative plan to be carried out by trained detectives.

The goal of reducing the number of unresolved homicides and missing person cases is important and significant not only for those Vermonters who reside in communities where these cases occurred; but as importantly to provide answers and resolution for family members of victims involved.

### **Proposed Legislation:**

Proposed legislation would provide the Department of Public Safety authorization and funding for at two (2) part time "cold case investigator" positions to be filled by individuals with prior law enforcement experience specifically with expertise in homicide and missing person investigations. Individuals chosen for these positions would work under the direction of MCU Commanders and would be assigned unresolved cases.

Proposed establishment of the Unresolved Case Accountability (UCA) Task Force, to be directed by the Vermont State Police Criminal Division Commander or designee. The UCA task force will be comprised of representatives from the Attorney General's Office, the State's Attorneys and Major Crime Unit Commanders. In addition, the UCA Task Force will include individuals with expertise in the following subjects: death investigation, missing person investigation, victimology, suspectology, interview and interrogation, cold cases, forensic science and victim advocacy. Civilian participants will be subject to a background check and will be required to abide by a non-disclosure agreement to ensure the integrity of sensitive information on active criminal investigations.

The UCA task force will meet quarterly to review unresolved homicide and missing person cases and will be provided all investigatory materials for review. Case presentations will be made to the task force by detectives and / or “cold case investigators”; and task force members will make recommendations to detectives in the form of an investigative plan. This process will continue until the case is resolved or until it is determined that all investigative avenues have been exhausted.