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Nova Scotia gets \$4.7-million to target gun violence, human trafficking

By Staff The Canadian Press

WATCH: Nova Scotia is getting \$4.7-million over five years in federal funding to help address crime, including gun and gang violence and a growing human trafficking problem. Alicia Draus has more on Wednesday's announcement.

Nova Scotia is getting \$4.7-million over five years in federal funding to help address crime, including gun and gang violence and a growing human trafficking problem.

The money announced Wednesday from Ottawa's \$327-million Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund, will go toward developing a gun and gang violence strategy, improved intelligence gathering and enhanced training for police officers and Crown attorneys.

Funding will also go to a variety of groups and organizations dealing with the effects of street-level crime.

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Provincial Justice Minister Mark Furey said the assistance is welcome in a province where 40 per cent of homicides were gun-related in 2017.

"We also know the number of suspected human trafficking cases is on the rise in Nova Scotia," Furey told a news conference at the legislature.

"Statistics Canada just recently released that Nova Scotia has the highest numbers and trends in the country. That's disturbing and it needs attention."

Figures released last year indicated Halifax and Ottawa had the country's highest rate of police-reported incidents of human trafficking between 2009 and 2016.

The Justice Department also said it had dealt with 42 cases of gang activity and organized

crime over the last seven years. Furey said there are currently 27 independent organized crime groups operating in the province.

“They challenge our law enforcement community and our community groups to continue to do the work they do to mitigate organized crime and to find solutions and options for communities and individuals,” Furey said.

Specifically, the announced funding will go toward a community mobilization project in Halifax’s Mulgrave Park area that responds to violent or traumatic incidents, and a program that supports Indigenous people awaiting trial, allowing them to navigate the court process and to access social programs.

“The funding is key because we can get some more training and do some workshops and educate our community more on the things that we are doing. And as well, educate them to empower themselves in the community,” said Suzy Hansen, a member of Mulgrave Park’s six-member community mobilization team.

Hansen said gang and gun violence is a big enough issue in Halifax that “we have to make sure that we protect our kids.”

Money will also help a YWCA program that assists survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

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Mia Suokonautio, executive director of YWCA Halifax, said the funding is a continuation of work her organization is doing to support victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Suokonautio said trafficking has become an issue across the province as young girls are recruited to work in the sex trade elsewhere in Canada.

“The number one risk factor is, you are a 13-year-old girl,” she said. “For us part of it is how do we respond, how are schools responding, how does the community, how does RCMP or policing?”

Bill Blair, federal Minister of Border Services and Organized Crime Reduction, stressed the importance of supporting groups who work in the community in order to prevent the conditions that lead to crime.

“We know that there are people in every part of this country who are working with young people to help make a difference, to help them make better choices,” said Blair. “That work is important and it’s making a difference.”

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