

## State creates crime unit to chase cold cases

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Justice should have no expiration date, officials with the Alabama Attorney General's office said Wednesday as they announced the formation of a new Cold Case Investigative Unit.

The purpose of the cold case team will be to investigate and prosecute unsolved criminal cases from throughout Alabama, with a special emphasis placed on unsolved civil rights-era murders, Attorney General Troy King said.

"As we reopen cases, we will seek to bring the light of justice to those who have gone too long in the darkness, by making sure that justice is won and done," King said at a news conference in his office.

The unit was formed after King met with Rep. John Knight -- chairman of the House Government Appropriations Committee -- who helped King's office secure a \$200,000 legislative appropriation to fund a team of two special investigators.

Out of the appropriated funds, \$130,000 will pay the salaries of the two investigators, with the rest going for vehicles, training, computers and travel expenses, King said.

The team begins its work in October.

J.W. Barnes, an investigator with the attorney general's office, was named Wednesday as the cold case unit's new director. A personnel search is under way for the second member of the team, King said.

Barnes said he has no prior experience in investigating cold cases, but said the 11 years he served as a homicide investigator with the Montgomery Police Department gives him the expertise he will need to be successful.

A three-man review board comprised of Barnes, William Dill, and Chris Browning -- all with the attorney general's office -- will decide which cases the team investigates.

"All the cases we select to prosecute will be tough cases, so we must be wise and judicious in the cases we pursue because of our limited dollars and manpower," Barnes said.

King said unsolved civil rights murders are among the most important cold cases his office should prosecute.

"These civil rights cases continue to stalk and walk the south," King said.

He said his office has been in contact with the Southern Poverty Law Center -- an international civil and human rights organization based in Montgomery -- to help determine which cases should be targeted for investigation.

Richard Cohen, president of the Southern Poverty Law Center, said an intensive review of Alabama's civil rights-era murders is important for the nation.

"We are delighted King is following in the footsteps of courageous law enforcement officials such as Bill Baxley and Doug Jones, both of whom successfully prosecuted civil rights era murderers in Alabama," Cohen said.

Cohen said he believes the unsolved murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson in Marion is an important case for the new unit to consider.

Jackson was a civil rights worker whose slaying Feb. 18, 1965, inspired the Selma-to-Montgomery march and the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

"I would hope Attorney General King would make available to the prosecutor of the Jimmie Lee Jackson case all the resources and manpower at his disposal to help right the overdue injustice of that important civil rights case," Cohen said.

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