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Legal bid to force Paisley jr to name officer

BY Staff reporter

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LAWYERS for the Billy Wright murder inquiry have launched a legal bid to force former DUP junior minister Ian Paisley jr to reveal the identity of a prison officer who told him of an alleged file destruction policy.

Mr Paisley has refused to name the man who supplied him with information which he then passed on to David Wright, father of the assassinated loyalist paramilitary chief.

After being denied his identity the tribunal headed by Lord MacLean has gone to the High Court in Belfast in an attempt to make the North Antrim assembly member cooperate with its requests.

The application, under Section 36 of the Inquiries Act, is believed to be the first of its kind to be made and lawyers have warned failure to comply without reasonable excuse could be seen as a criminal offence.

In a statement contained in legal papers Mr Paisley says he was told of an alleged policy within the Northern Ireland Prison Service to destroy files as an emergency due to data protection legislation. It was suggested that up to 5,600 files were destroyed shortly after Wright (37), pictured, was shot dead by republicans inside the Maze jail in December 1997.

Mr Paisley said details were given to him in confidence by a senior prison officer who approached him last June while he was still a junior minister at Stormont.

With the information regarded as relevant to the public inquiry into claims of security force collusion in the killing, he decided the most appropriate action was to pass it on to the murdered LVF leader's father.

"I know that he did not want his identity known because he said so and provided the information on that basis," Mr Paisley said, pictured below.

"He said he had his own employment to think about and his own personal and family security as he still works within the prison service."

The DUP man insisted in his statement that he was not prepared to identify the prison officer because of the concerns expressed.

"Moreover, I believe that my role as an elected public representative can only be properly performed if I can pass on this type of information of public

interest to the inquiry in a way that protects my integrity as a person who can be relied upon not to divulge the confidence people have in me for protecting them," he said.


After the case was adjourned until next month Joe Rice, solicitor for Mr Paisley, claimed the legal bid had potentially major implications.

"This is a unique application both in Northern Ireland and, in my experience, in the UK," he said.

"Obviously it affects the overall position of all elected public representatives who confidentially provide information in good faith to various inquiries and tribunals."

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