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Sunday, January 13, 2008

THE Policing Board should set aside £1 million to encourage witnesses to come forward to convict the Omagh bombers, the father of one of the victims has said.

Michael Gallagher says that at least £1m should be set aside from the police budget to fund a protection scheme to encourage witnesses to come forward and give evidence that will convict the bombers.

At a meeting 10 days ago, the Chief Constable told the Board that unless witnesses came forward to give evidence, the bombers were unlikely to be convicted even though their identities were known to detectives.

Mr Gallagher, whose son Aidan was killed in the 1998 atrocity, says it is time the board took positive steps to try to nail the bombers.

He also wants a confidential briefing from Policing Board chairman Sir Desmond Rea about what he has been told in private by senior PSNI officers.

Mr Gallagher said: "I and other relatives are very concerned at the Board's proposal to commission an external overview of the various police investigations into Omagh.

"It says in its statement that this should consider the various recommendations arising from the deficiencies of the initial investigation and the various reports that have been made on developments since then.

"That could take years and all it will do is eat up resources and clog up our efforts to bring the perpetrators before the courts. The families don't want this at all, we know what the recommendations are and they won't bring the killers to justice," he said.

"The Policing Board has yet to arrange a meeting with the families to hear our views and consider our proposals and we want that to happen as soon as possible.

"What we need is money to be set aside to guarantee any witnesses protection for the rest of their lives if they come forward and give evidence."

In a statement the Policing Board would only say that it would consider the terms of reference for the proposed review at its next meeting in February.

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