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Forensic scientist supports killer

Michael McKenna

ONE of Queensland's most notorious convicted killers will have the help of a former police forensic scientist in a fresh bid to clear his name and implicate three other men in the 1991 murder of 12-year-old schoolgirl Leanne Holland.

Graham Stafford is expected next week to file his long-awaited petition for a pardon, with statements from three scientists — including retired forensic expert Russell Luke — who have raised serious doubts about crucial evidence that sent him to jail for 15 years.

The petition, which follows a book and two-part television program on Stafford's fight to be cleared, will focus on the possibility that a long-time informant of the Criminal Justice Commission was involved in the brutal murder. The man, a convicted child molester, was a CJC informant and friend of several police officers involved in the initial investigation.

An investigating officer, Detective Senior Sergeant Graham Richards, was stood down this year amid an investigation over alleged improper relationships

between prisoners and police.

In September, the man's daughter broke her silence in an interview with *The Australian* in which she told how her father — once a neighbour of Holland — had molested her a month before and at the same remote bushland spot that the school-girl's mutilated body was found.

The woman, who still lives in fear of her father — who was released on parole after serving seven years on incest charges — has given a sworn statement and offered to undergo a lie detector test over her claims, which indicate striking similarities between her abuse and torture and that which was evident on the body of Holland.

She first made the claims to police and, again in court, more than a decade ago. "I told police at the time of my father's trial that Stafford wasn't guilty and that my father was the killer," she said. "Leanne knew my dad, knew he was friends with the police, so she would not have been scared about getting into his car."

Last year, then Queensland attorney-general Linda Lavarch

encouraged Stafford, 44, to seek a pardon after a book by former police detective Graeme Crowley and criminologist Paul Wilson raised serious questions about the scientific evidence used to convict Stafford.

Forensic scientist Angela van Daal, who gave evidence against Stafford at his 1992 trial, has subsequently said she no longer believes the right man was convicted.

Mr Luke, a former Brisbane scientist, was asked by police to review the evidence ahead of Stafford's unsuccessful 1997 appeal but was not presented to the Court of Appeal after he also attacked the prosecution case.

"To put it bluntly, some of the evidence was woeful," Mr Luke said earlier this year.

Mr Crowley yesterday said that after more than a decade of investigating the case, he believes that there may have been three people involved in the murder, possibly led by the former CJC informant.

The former informant lives on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, with the other two men in prison for murder.