

'Real killer' known to Leanne's family - Cousin breaks silence to halt Stafford deportation

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EXCLUSIVE

A RELATIVE of murder victim Leanne Holland says her convicted killer Graham Stafford is innocent. It is the first time in 15 years that a member of Leanne's family has supported Stafford's claims he was jailed for a crime he did not commit.

"I and many others in our family, as well as many friends, have always believed in Graham's innocence," the girl's cousin Beverley Miller said yesterday.

"We always believed that eventually the guilty person would be brought to justice.

"Now we are concerned that this young man is to be deported to prevent the real culprit from being brought to justice."

Stafford, 43, who always maintained his innocence, was jailed for life in 1992 for the rape and murder a year earlier of the 12-year-old from Goodna in Ipswich.

He was given early parole in May this year and his family and supporters immediately stepped up their campaign to get the State Government to pardon him.

But The Sunday Mail last week revealed English-born Stafford had suffered a major setback, with the Immigration Department threatening to deport him.

He was given until Thursday to convince them he should be allowed to stay but sources say immigration officials are likely to delay making a decision until Stafford's legal team has put his petition for a pardon to the State Government.

Immigration officials contacted the office of Queensland Attorney-General Kerry Shine and inquired about timing of the petition.

Stafford's legal team is working frantically to complete the detailed document, which is seen as a final bid to clear his name.

Mrs Miller, of Silverdale, southwest of Ipswich, said Stafford's deportation battle prompted her to break her silence over her cousin's murder.

She said it would be a "gross miscarriage of justice" if Stafford were kicked out of the country.

Stafford "did not commit the crime".

"We as a family have our own theory of who was involved. But we have no evidence," she said.

Mrs Miller identified a known police informant who was connected to the Holland family as the most likely suspect.

"It's just a gut feeling . . . he was determined to do some damage to the family," she said. Mrs Miller said family members believed Stafford had been set up.

She said family members had been discouraged from speaking out.

But Leanne's father Terry remains convinced Stafford is guilty.

"I believe he is absolutely guilty. That's all I've ever said," Mr Holland told an Ipswich newspaper.

Caption: CONCERNED: Beverley Miller (right) says Graham Stafford (above) did not kill her cousin Leanne Holland

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