Victims will be better protected and cyberbullies will be held accountable for their actions, with legislative changes to the Cyber-Safety Act the province introduced today, April 25.

The legislation will create the country's first cyber-investigative unit and allow families and victims to get protection orders from the court. School principals will also have clear authority to act against bullying or cyberbullying, on or off school grounds.

"For too long, cyberbullies have been able to torment others, knowing the authorities would have a hard time holding them accountable," said Justice Minister Ross Landry. "That is about to change.

"This legislation will help identify cyberbullies who often hide behind IP addresses or off school grounds, and stop their harmful actions."

The province is creating a new Cyber SCAN investigative unit within the Justice Department. Investigators will respond quickly to complaints, negotiate formal or informal resolutions and, if necessary, seek a cyberbullying prevention order. The court may order a person stop the online communication. The unit will be up and running this fall.

Education Act amendments will also reflect the need for school boards to co-operate fully with investigators.

"We need to remember that students who are cyberbullying are young people, too, and some do not understand the seriousness of their behaviour," said Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Ramona Jennex. "Having an investigator come to their door can, very quickly, take away their keyboard courage, stopping the harmful action and teaching young people to take responsibility and make better decisions in future."

The legislation will also allow victims and their families to seek a court protection order. Similar to an order that can be sought by the cyber-investigative unit, it can ban a person from contacting the victim, talking about them online, or using any means of electronic communication. Courts could also order computers, smartphones or tablets be confiscated.

"As a student attending high school, I feel that if I were to ever come across a problem such as cyberbullying, I would feel more than comfortable going to a teacher or an adult," said Hilary Beck, a Grade 12 student at
Halifax West High School. "If this was done to me or another student, the ability to speak to an adult is so important during these times."

Victims will also be able to file a legal action against cyberbullies. If the cyberbully is a minor, their parents could be liable for damages.

The events leading up to Rehtaeh Parsons's tragic death earlier this month made the need clear for swift and comprehensive actions. Other provincial actions include:
-- pushing for changes to the Criminal Code
-- reviewing how the Halifax Regional School Board, IWK Health Centre, Capital Health and associated agencies approached events leading up to Ms. Parsons's death
-- reviewing how the police and Public Prosecution Service handled the case, immediately after the criminal process
-- co-ordinating a public education campaign

Status of Women Minister Marilyn More is co-ordinating the provincial action. She is meeting with community and women's groups, youth and others to seek their advice. She is also meeting with Wayne MacKay, who chaired the task force on bullying and cyberbullying.

"Cyberbullying and technology is changing the world around us at a rapid pace, but technology is only a tool," said Ms. More. "The reason that technology is used to cause hurt and harm link to broader issues around sexual violence, issues that have evolved over generations.

"Nova Scotia is not alone in the need to respond to this tremendous challenge, but I am inspired by the countless groups and individuals who have asked what they can do."

Ms. More also thanked the cyberbullying task force members for their advice that is shaping the way forward.

"This collective energy and will presents an opportunity to make a real difference, and to better protect girls, women and all Nova Scotians," she said.

More information on where people can turn if they need help is available at www.novascotia.ca.

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