RCMP Statement TO W5:

The RCMP sympathizes with the family and friends of Ms. Colleen Gaffney and we are saddened by her loss. We hope that discussing this case will help raise awareness about how criminal schemes can have tragic consequences and we urge victims, or potential victims who might otherwise stay silent, to come forward.

Summary of police actions into Ms. Gaffney’s case

In October 2017, Surrey RCMP received a call from an individual who was concerned for Ms. Gaffney’s well-being. Police actions focussed on locating her and ensuring she received immediate assistance. A fraud investigation was not initiated.

In January 2018, Surrey RCMP, responded to a call from an individual about Ms. Gaffney and concerns regarding allegations of fraud. Attending RCMP members investigated the matter in an attempt to glean information related to the complaint. In speaking to police, Ms. Gaffney denied being a victim and would not disclose any details of transactions with others. Nevertheless, the RCMP informed Ms. of the dangers of fraud in many forms. Responding RCMP officers explained to Ms. that fraudsters can use an array of online scams, including expressions of romantic interest, to take money from their victims. The complainant was also advised of the limitations police faced in dealing with this type of case.

On October 9, 2018, Ms. Gaffney was found deceased in Delta, BC. Delta Police responded to the scene and had carriage of the investigation.

In conclusion, despite attempts by individuals to alert the RCMP of the scam, police had limited options due to the lack of independent evidence during their interactions with Ms. Gaffney, and her insistence that she was not the victim of a fraud. Therefore, the RCMP officers reasonably made the determination to conclude the investigation. The RCMP has no records indicating Ms. Gaffney ever personally filed a complaint with either the RCMP or the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre.

How to recognize the signs of a scam

The circumstances of this tragic case illustrate that anyone can fall victim to fraud. Some of the typical behaviour of online romance scammers include avoiding invitations to meet in person, professing their love for the victim early in the online relationship, claiming to live not far from the victim but working overseas. Fraudsters also often rely on their victim’s unwillingness to recognize that they’re a victim of fraud.

Fraudsters will often invent an emergency situation to pressure their victim’s for money, acting distressed or angry if the victim does not comply, though usually not overtly threatening their victim in the process. The scammer will discourage the victim’s contact with others in order to isolate them from family or friends who grow suspicious of the relationship.

These types of fraud, where victims are typically approached by phone or online, are exceptionally difficult for police to investigate. The majority of fraud is not committed by amateurs. These schemes
are being attributed to criminal organizations, some overseas and some in Canada. Fraudsters use
technology to their advantage, creating layers to avoid detection and attempting to elude law
enforcement.

Unfortunately, this makes the prospect of arrest, prosecution and recovery of funds highly unlikely.
Police of jurisdiction often have to choose where to invest limited resources in order to best protect
public safety.

The best way to fight these types of crime is through prevention. Public awareness is an important tool
in preventing the victimization of Canadians. The more people know about a specific scam, the less likely
they are to fall victim to it. That is why it is extremely important that people report fraud to their local
police and to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (CAFC), so that law enforcement can share information
and assist each other when opportunities arise to educate the public and further investigation these

When the CAFC receives information on a fraud case, they analyze the data, disseminate the victim’s
evidence and provide the necessary information to law enforcement agencies who may be investigating
similar frauds in their jurisdiction. This information assists in raising awareness of current scams,
potentially disrupting criminal and providing support to law enforcement.

Nationally and internationally, the RCMP does not have a mandate to pursue individual cases. However,
by working with municipal, provincial, national and international law enforcement, and government and
private sector partners, the RCMP is working hard to prevent, detect and deter organized crime groups
that target Canadians and impact the economic integrity of Canada.

We work with Canadian and US telecom companies, the International Mass Marketing Fraud Working
Group, law enforcement agencies from the Five Eyes countries, regulators, all police forces in Canada
and the CAFC.

While Canadian law enforcement has had some success in taking down fraudsters at home and abroad,
new scams or variations of older scams always resurface. Criminals adapt their methods quickly and this
is why we believe that prevention, awareness and education is key.