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## 'No minutes' of talks on victims' commissioners

BY Staff reporter

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OFFICIALS working for First Minister Ian Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness say no records of private meetings to appoint four victims' commissioners were kept, the High Court in Belfast was told yesterday.

Lawyers for Michelle Williamson, whose parents were murdered by the IRA, said a "yawning gap" remained

BY NICKY BRYAN

“Neither of them appears to have committed to paper one word concerning their extensive, intensive deliberations about the appointment process,” Barry Macdonald QC said.

“No-one else seems to have been present at any of these crucial meetings.”

Mr Macdonald, representing Ms Williamson in her attempt to have the commissioners' appointments quashed, had been due to apply to have Mr Paisley and Mr McGuinness attend court to answer questions but his subpoena application was adjourned because of a legal requirement that they should be given more time to consider the issues arising in the judicial review case.

Mr Macdonald did, however, raise questions about whether the first minister and deputy first minister were entitled to make the appointments and the reasons for their decision.

He said an affidavit filed on behalf of Mr Paisley and Mr McGuinness was “manifestly inadequate”.

“The respondents claim to have no minutes, notes or other records of the private meetings between the first minister and deputy first minister, or discussions concerning various matters,” Mr Macdonald said.

Ms Williamson, whose mother Gillian and father George died in the 1993 bomb attack on the Shankill Road in Belfast, has said the four commissioners are unacceptable to innocent victims of violence.

Her opposition has focused on the appointment of Patricia MacBride, whose brother has been described as an IRA volunteer killed on active service.

The other commissioners are RUC widow Bertha McDougal, former broadcaster Mike Nesbitt and Brendan McAllister, former director of Mediation Northern Ireland.

Bernard McCloskey QC, for the first minister and deputy first minister, said his clients should be given time to examine the claims being made.

He confirmed plans to bring an application to have the case rendered academic because of legislation allowing the appointment of a commission rather than a single commissioner.

“The new legislation has received royal assent. That, we submit, impacts very obviously on the first, main ground of challenge,” Mr McCloskey said.

Mr Justice Gillen adjourned the case until next week.

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