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## **Executive to bail out miscarriage of justice campaign**

By Liam McDougall, Home Affairs Editor

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**THE Scottish Executive** has agreed to fund a group formed to assist victims of miscarriages of justice.

Justice minister Cathy Jamieson pledged annual funding of £50,000 to help the advocacy body continue highlighting cases of people wrongly jailed for crimes.

The move comes just weeks before workers at the Miscarriages of Justice Organisation (Mojo) Scotland would have been forced to wind up the cash-strapped voluntary group.

Mojo, founded by Paddy Hill of the Birmingham Six, had threatened a high-profile press conference with miscarriage of justice victim Robert Brown if the cash was refused.

The Executive's commitment to supporting those wrongly convicted by the courts would have been questioned at the conference.

Last night, news of the funding, which will initially be for two years, was welcomed by the group as "an important first step". It will be used to set up a freephone helpline and help provide advice and counselling.

But the group also said it wanted to raise funds to create a retreat where the psychological effects of those wrongly imprisoned could be addressed.

John McManus, of Mojo, said: "This funding will allow us to continue to help individuals back into society. But this is only the first step in the process. It will help us to seek alternative ways to raise funds to set up a retreat for an aftercare counselling programme."

He added: "We were weeks away from folding and we were going to go public and pull the plug on ourselves. This money is a massive step forward."

Hill, who spent 16 years in jail after being wrongly convicted of the IRA bombings on two Birmingham pubs in November 1974 in which killed 21 people, said he was "delighted" by the news. But he criticised the Westminster government's failure to fund Mojo south of the Border.

Pauline McNeill MSP, Justice 1 committee convener and a Mojo supporter, said the funding was "a victory for Mojo and for the Scottish parliament".

Jamieson said: "In 1999 we set up a Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission which now refers relevant cases to the Court of Appeal. But the toll taken on victims of a miscarriage of justice is not simply erased by any compensation they may ultimately receive."

She said the Executive had to "acknowledge a gap in provision" for those who have been wrongly jailed.

Mojo has been instrumental in campaigning against several miscarriage cases including Robert Brown, Tommy Campbell and the former police officer Shirley McKie.