

Ontario lawyers hold line on legal aid boycott

Last Updated: Friday, November 27, 2009 | 7:15 PM ET [Comments 11](#) [Recommend 5](#)

The Canadian Press

The promise of talks aimed at resolving Ontario's legal aid boycott saw the province's Criminal Lawyers' Association agree Friday not to expand their protest — for now.

The group was considering extending its current boycott on guns and gangs cases to all types of offences. But association president Frank Addario urged the board to hold off after the Attorney General's office contacted him Thursday night and offered to sit down to try to hammer out an agreement.

"It's encouraging and it's positive," Addario said. "I'm thinking that maybe they really want to sit down with us and talk about what's needed to attract service providers back to the program."

The group can still decide to expand the boycott if it finds talks aren't progressing during the 60 days set aside to try to resolve the issue.

Attorney General Chris Bentley said he was pleased he'll have a chance to talk about how to spend a government investment of \$150 million over four years for legal aid, but said once again that's all the money the province could afford.

Criminal lawyers have said in the past that, while a step forward, that money wouldn't been enough to solve years of inadequate funding by previous governments.

Bentley has expressed frustration with requests for more money at a time when the province faces a \$25-billion deficit.

As the threat of a bigger boycott loomed Thursday, Bentley said he was prepared to do whatever was necessary to provide access to justice.

While the government can't force the lawyers back to work, Bentley had suggested he would take strong action if the lawyers ramped up their protest, and he didn't rule out setting up a public defender system.

AG happy with progress

On Friday, however, Bentley said he was happy to see some progress, since the funding wasn't going out the door during the dispute.

"The importance of the last 24 hours is the willingness to have discussions and to have the exchange of views and to see how far this money will actually go," he said.

The discussions are expected to focus on the amount of funding required for the program, the allocation of that funding and a review of the legal aid tariff funding mechanism.

The boycott, which began in June, now includes hundreds of criminal lawyers who are upset with the gap between what they are paid through legal aid and what provincial prosecutors earn.

A former Superior Court justice, the province's Crown attorneys and the Association in Defence of the Wrongly Convicted are among those who have since joined the protest, warning that continuing neglect will do irreversible damage to the justice system.

Addario said 105 cases have been affected by the boycott so far, with roughly 25 currently before the courts.

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[Riley of the North](#) wrote: Posted 2009/11/30

at 7:23 AM ET To all the dumb wits appalled that we are paying for the lawyers of criminals. Ummm.... so if they do not get legal representation, they do not get convicted and then they stay on the streets. Would love to see what you say when you become the victim of crime and the perp walks b/c of this. Not so appalling now is it??

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[mayow-9iron](#) wrote: Posted 2009/11/29

at 9:36 AM ET What??!! The lawyers want the Government to pay for their salaries??! I thought only people on welfare clamour for Government funds..Bring on the Public Defender system, that's the only way of guaranteeing legal representation. If it's run properly of course..

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[A.J. Trudeau](#) wrote: Posted 2009/11/27

at 9:40 PM ET Lawyers have created this hugely complicated system only to be well compensated and the average person can't possibly defend himself. Time for a change..let it fail

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[SquareDeal](#) wrote: Posted 2009/11/27

at 9:09 PM ET For all the lame-brains criticizing lawyers for overcharging.

The fees in question paid to a criminal lawyer would not cover one hour of work by a mechanic at Canadian