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Rickwood now has two defence attorneys

Posted By KYLE REA, Times-Journal

Posted 1 day ago

A St. Thomas man who is appealing to the Superior Court of Justice in November to get a court-appointed lawyer now has support from two attorneys, free of charge, thanks to an organization of defence lawyers.

Frank Addario, president of the Criminal Lawyers Association, has confirmed that two lawyers, including Paul Burstein from Toronto, Ont., will handle the case of Lucas Rickwood, 27, in St. Thomas on Nov. 18.

"We have a team of lawyers who are prepared to go and make that argument anywhere," Addario said, noting CLA lawyers are doing this for free.

Two lawyers are being appointed to argue each case that pops up.

"We're supporting lawyers who decline to accept legal aid certificates to publicize the inadequate funding of the legal aid system.

The courts have the duty to make sure someone who needs a lawyer gets one."

Rickwood, who's charged with attempted murder after a downtown stabbing in July, wants to hire Robert Upsdell of St. Thomas as his lawyer but needs legal aid.

Upsdell can't take the case, however, because he's part of the Criminal Lawyers' Association's boycott of the legal aid system.

Addario said a dozen cases involving people who need legal aid but can't find a lawyer are before the courts across the province and even more are anticipated.

He added, however, the province, "has a larger team of lawyers ready to oppose these applications."

A spokesman for the Ontario ministry of the attorney general said the ministry has not been served with any application for publicly-funded counsel.

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Brendan Crawley continued in an e-mail:

"If we are served in due course we will carefully review it and assess how to respond."

Since the boycott began on June 1, more than 700 lawyers across the province have signed on to protest, what they deem to be two decades of chronic underfunding of the legal aid system.

Previously, Addario said, when legal aid was established, the idea was to compensate defence lawyers for 80% of their hourly costs.

Today, the actual amount is less than one-third.

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There's been no movement toward resolving the boycott since Attorney General Chris Bentley announced \$150 million over four years for the legal aid system in early September.

At the time Addario said it was a step in the right direction, but wasn't enough.

"Members have strongly and clearly rejected that injection ... as a solution," he said, adding the boycott will continue "indefinitely," until a solution is found.

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