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Ontario's AG offers olive branch in legal aid dispute

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The president of the Criminal Lawyers' Association is urging against an expansion of Ontario's legal aid boycott after the government offered an olive branch to try to end the protest.

Association president Frank Addario says that after a months-long battle, the attorney general's office contacted him last night and offered to sit down to try to hammer out an agreement.

Addario says he welcomes the chance to explain to government officials why legal aid funding isn't enough to provide proper defences in complex cases and to discuss how funding could be best put to use.

Both sides will have 60 days to try to solve the boycott, Addario adds, but says either can pull out at any time if there is no progress.

An expansion of the boycott from the current focus on guns and gangs cases to all cases is still on the table, and will be voted on by the lawyers' group's board this afternoon.

Addario is urging the board to hold off on that expansion, however, until he sees what comes out of negotiations with the government.

Criminal lawyers began the boycott in June because they say there is an unfair gap between what they are paid through legal aid and what provincial prosecutors earn.

The government has so far agreed to a funding increase of \$150 million over four years and has said there wasn't any more money for the struggling program.