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Ontario Judge at centre of loan probe

Accused of borrowing from Crown attorneys, Attorney General calls for independent scrutiny

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An Ontario judge is being investigated by provincial police amid allegations the judge borrowed thousands of dollars from two Crown attorneys whose cases were regularly tried in the judge's court.

Attorney General Michael Bryant said yesterday he reported the Welland judge to police after receiving a query about the propriety of an alleged \$3,000 loan.

His office is now in the process of offering legal aid to 21 people who pleaded guilty in cases prosecuted by the Crown attorneys in the judge's court while the loans were outstanding.

"When I became aware of the facts I was right away concerned about a potential conflict of interest and wanted to ensure that we took every single step possible within the ministry, and obtain independent scrutiny from outside the ministry, to ensure that our justice system is working as it should be," Bryant said in an interview.

"What I want each of these individuals to have is some independent legal advice to

pursue the question of whether or not they feel that there was a conflict of interest."

Another person found guilty in the judge's court during the period of the alleged loan is also being contacted.

The people involved are being told they can have independent legal advice, paid for by the province at the legal aid rate, in order to consider legal action, Bryant said. So far, none of the individuals have contacted the government or sought an appeal.

The judge under investigation has resigned, Bryant said. The two Crown attorneys were immediately assigned to out-of-court duties, and police have determined there was no criminal misconduct on their part.

Retired Quebec judge Michele Proulx, who has expertise in legal ethics, has been retained by the ministry to advise the province.