

Judge slashes 'monstrous' fine in music piracy case

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A man listens to online music. Condemning a two-million-dollar fine meted out to a Minnesota woman for illegally downloading music over the Internet as "monstrous and shocking," a judge has slashed the penalty to 54,000 dollars.

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US District Court Michael Davis said the fine imposed by a jury on Jammie Thomas-Rasset, a single mother of four from the town of Brainerd, veered into the "realm of gross injustice."

In a high-profile music piracy case, Thomas-Rasset was found liable in June of violating music copyrights for using the Kazaa peer-to-peer file-sharing network to download 24 songs.

A jury ordered her to pay 1.92 million dollars -- or 80,000 dollars per song -- to six record companies: Capitol Records, Sony BMG Music, Arista Records, Interscope Records, [Warner Bros.](#) Records and UMG Recordings.

Davis slashed the fine to 54,000 dollars, or 2,250 dollars per recording, and complained in his ruling on Friday, a copy of which was obtained by AFP on Monday, that he was constrained from reducing it even further.

"This reduced award is significant and harsh," Davis said, but it is "no longer monstrous and shocking."

"The need for deterrence cannot justify a two million verdict for stealing and illegally distributing 24 songs for the sole purpose of obtaining free music," Davis said

The recording companies which brought the suit have until Friday to accept the award or request a new trial.

Thomas-Rasset had been convicted previously, in October 2007, and ordered to pay 220,000 dollars in damages but the judge who presided over that trial threw out the verdict calling it "wholly disproportionate" and "oppressive."

The case was filed by the [Recording Industry Association of America](#) (RIAA), which has brought suit against thousands of people for illegally downloading and [sharing music](#), with most agreeing to settlements of between 3,000 and 5,000 dollars.

Thomas-Rasset was the first among those being sued to refuse a settlement, however, and took the case to court. Her case is the only one among the thousands filed to have actually gone to trial.

In December 2008, the RIAA said it will stop suing people who download music illegally and focus instead on getting Internet Service Providers to take action.

The move away from litigation represented a major shift in strategy for the [music](#) industry group, which had filed lawsuits against some 35,000 people for online [music piracy](#) since 2003.

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