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Copyright Royalty Judges Make Record Progress In Moving Stalled Royalty Payments to Content Owners

The Copyright Royalty Judges this month distributed \$750 million to copyright holders in satellite and cable royalty payments that have been tied up in private-sector disputes for several years.

The distribution is the largest single distribution in the six-year history of the panel, and clears the majority of backlogged satellite and cable payment disputes.

The distribution comprises royalty payments from satellite and cable companies to content creators for programming transmitted during the 2004-2009 period. The distribution resulted from proceedings convened by the judges to bring disputes to conclusion between private parties for outstanding 2004 and 2005 payments. Following these proceedings, parties privately negotiated a resolution to disputes for 2006-2009.

The distributions reflect significant progress toward achieving the judges' congressional mandate of improving efficiency of transactions required by statute between copyright holders and distributors.

“This is a significant milestone, representing the successful conclusion of years of negotiation and effort to clear this backlog of payments owed to content creators,” said Chief Judge James Sledge. “This is exactly what this panel was intended to do, and now that these years-old disputes are cleared, we are well-positioned to meet the goal of clearing disputes going forward on a two-year timetable.”

Some additional disputes remain outstanding for the same six-year time period and the judges expect additional royalties to be distributed throughout the year.

Under cable and satellite statutory licenses, copyright holders of broadcast programming cannot challenge use of their content by cable systems and/or satellite carriers in exchange for compliance with terms and payment of royalties by the services. Copyright holders must file claims with the judges each July to be eligible to receive royalty payments, either by private agreement or determination of the judges.

About the Copyright Royalty Judges

The Copyright Royalty Judges, who are appointed by the Librarian of Congress, are a statutory body charged with facilitating efficiency of transactions required by law between copyright holders and distributors. The judges conduct proceedings between parties when the parties are unable to reach agreement on royalty terms, and facilitate distribution of royalties in concert with the U.S. Copyright Office.

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