Music Piracy Suit Against N.Y. Family Is Settled for $7,000

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After battling a suburban family for four years over music downloads, the recording industry has agreed to accept $7,000 to settle a federal music piracy lawsuit.

If approved by a judge, the settlement would end a four-year fight between record companies and the family of Patricia Santangelo, 46, a mother of five, who lives in Wappingers Falls, N.Y.

She was accused of illegally downloading and distributing music, but she says she could not have downloaded anything because she did not know how.

She was one of thousands of people sued in the Recording Industry Association of America’s antipiracy campaign, and she refused to settle. Instead, she took her case to national news outlets and became a heroine to supporters of online freedom. An Internet campaign raised about $15,000 for her defense.

The industry eventually dropped its suit against the mother. But it filed a new one against two of her children, Michelle and Robert, ages 20 and 16 at the time.

The new lawsuit said the children had downloaded and distributed more than 1,000 songs, including “MMMBop” by Hanson and “Beat It” by Michael Jackson.

It said that Michelle had admitted piracy in a deposition and that Robert had been implicated by a family friend. They denied wrongdoing.

Under the terms of the settlement, filed in court in White Plains late Friday, the Santangelos will pay $7,000.

They paid half the amount April 20 and are to make six payments of $583.33 by October.

“We are pleased to have reached an agreement with the Santangelos,” Cara Duckworth, a spokeswoman for the R.I.A.A., said in an e-mailed statement. Asked how much had been spent to win the $7,000 settlement, and whether it was a victory, she said, “We don’t
break out costs per case, and it’s not a question of it being ‘worth it’ or a ‘victory.’ ”

She said the lawsuit had succeeded in showing that breaking the law has consequences and in steering music fans toward legal online services “that fairly compensate musicians and labels.”

Jordan Glass, a lawyer for the family, said the Santangelos had never admitted wrongdoing, and that with both Santangelo children now in college, the settlement offer was accepted to control costs.
Editorial: One Hundred

President Obama has made a strong start at addressing the most critical of the failed policies and threats that he inherited.