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## High court strikes down B.C. court fees

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OTTAWA – The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that British Columbia has the right to charge administrative court fees, but they can't be so high as to prevent litigants from accessing the legal system.

The justices say the effect of the B.C. fee scheme would be to deny some people access to the courts, so they struck it down as unconstitutional by a 6-1 margin.

It is a landmark ruling on the issue of public access to the courts.

The case stems from a child-custody dispute in which a woman said she could not afford the \$3,600 she was charged for a 10-day trial.

B.C.'s superior court originally ruled the fees unconstitutional, because, while the very poorest are exempt, they still apply to other people of modest means and prevent them from pursuing their legal claims.

The B.C. Appeal Court agreed but widened the exemption to include other people in need.

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