

Court gives final approval to Anthropic's \$1.5bn settlement with book authors

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Court Grants Final Approval of \$1.5 Billion Anthropic Copyright Settlement

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On July 20, 2026, Judge Araceli Martínez-Olguín of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California granted final approval of the landmark \$1.5 billion class action settlement in *Bartz v. Anthropic* and entered final judgment in the case. The order comes some ten and a half months after the parties reached a historic settlement in the closely watched copyright infringement lawsuit over unauthorized uses of authors' works in AI training and development.

The Authors Guild looks forward to the commencement of the distribution process so that authors can start getting paid. While a specific date for the commencement of payouts hasn't been announced, we hope and expect that this will happen quickly. We will update this blog as soon as we learn anything.

Settlement Provides "Substantial Benefits"

The court emphasized that the \$1.5 billion settlement provides "substantial benefits to the Class in light of the novel claims asserted," and taking the claims to trial could have left the authors "no recourse" despite their strong case.

The order, quoting the court's earlier opinion in the case, underscores the exceptional strength of the recovery, noting that the approximately \$3,000 per-work award is "four times the statutory minimum for ordinary infringement" of \$750, "which is also the most common award in copyright cases." The court also observed that the per-work amount is an order of magnitude greater than the maximum proposed for books in the Google Books settlement, which was rejected in 2011 in part because it released future claims, unlike the Anthropic settlement, which preserves those claims.

Under the settlement, class members release only claims relating to Anthropic's past acquisition and copying of their works—the "inputs" side—through August 25, 2025. Claims based on AI outputs are not released, and neither are any claims of any kind about future conduct. The court went out of its way to note that "a narrow release benefits the Class"—members "retain their rights to sue for future misconduct," and the "past-only release does not apply to any output claims." And for authors whose books do not appear on the Works List, the court was equally clear: Claims arising from works not on the list, "even if they otherwise meet or appear to meet the other class criteria," are "preserved and unaffected by the Settlement."

The court also found that the notice campaign (the court-approved program for informing class members of the settlement and their rights) "constituted the best notice that is practicable under the circumstances" and fully satisfied due process. Direct mail and email went out to nearly 595,000 potential class members, successfully

reaching rightsholders associated with 99.5 percent of the works on the Works List. To find those rightsholders, the settlement administrator compiled contact information from a wide range of sources, including submissions by the Authors Guild, other writers' organizations, the Authors Registry, and more than 170 publishers. The Guild is proud to have played a part in making sure authors learned of their rights and could claim what they are owed .

Reduced Attorney's Fees and Service Awards to Named Plaintiffs

One of the most significant aspects of the order concerns attorney's fees. Class counsel—whom the court praised as “excellent,” experienced attorneys—had reduced their initial fee request from 20 percent to 12.5 percent of the fund (\$187.5 million). However, the court cut fees down even further in the final order to about 6.8 percent of the settlement fund, or approximately \$101.56 million, and ordered that 10 percent of even that amount be withheld until class counsel file a post-distribution accounting, with discretion to reduce the award further if counsel's actual hours come in below projections. The court also trimmed the requested service awards for the three class representatives from \$50,000 to \$15,000 each, while recognizing the substantial work Andrea Bartz, Charles Graeber, and Kirk Wallace Johnson performed on behalf of fellow authors, from sitting for depositions to shaping the plan of allocation and notice materials.

Every dollar not paid in fees stays in the non-reversionary fund for authors. And if money remains after all valid claims are paid, the parties anticipate redistributing it to class members; if a final balance remains that is economically infeasible to distribute, it will go—subject to court approval—to charitable purposes.

Non-Monetary Relief: Destruction of the Pirated Files

Beyond the money, the settlement requires Anthropic to destroy all original files of works torrented or downloaded from Library Genesis and Pirate Library Mirror, along with any copies originating from them, subject to legal preservation obligations. The court expressly recognized this destruction as a benefit to class members. Anthropic has also represented that neither dataset, nor any portion of them, was in the training corpus of any of its commercially released large language models.

Objections

The order devotes substantial attention to the 54 objections and comments filed by class members and others. Although class counsel argued that many objections were procedurally improper, the court declined to overrule any docketed objection on procedural grounds, addressing each category on substance instead.

To authors who worried that eligible books were left off the Works List, the order assures them that claims arising from works not on the list, “even if they otherwise meet or appear to meet the other class criteria,” are “preserved and unaffected by the Settlement.” The Works List, the court explains, exists to provide “certainty and finality” about which claims are released, and works outside it release nothing at all.

To authors who argued that \$1.5 billion was too low against the Copyright Act's statutory ceiling of \$150,000 per work, the order responds with the risks of trial vis-à-vis the benefits of the settlement. Referencing an earlier privacy class action case, the court observed that “a multi-billion dollar verdict could create its own major risk for the class,” as courts have repeatedly flagged due process limits on massive aggregate statutory awards. Against those risks, the order concludes, the settlement “provides value in prompt closure.”

What Happens Next

With final judgment entered, the settlement moves into its distribution phase. Payments to authors will proceed under the court-approved Plan of Allocation, with valid claimants receiving a pro rata per-work share divided among copyright owners according to elected default splits (available for non-education works) or the percentages set by their publishing contracts. A court-appointed Special Master, Theodore K. Cheng, will resolve any disputes among claimants over a given work, with submissions—including publishing agreements—kept confidential and under seal. Notably, class counsel committed to receiving their fees in step with monies paid out to class members, not merely paid into the fund, and the parties must file a post-distribution accounting addressing any concerns raised by class members during administration.

This settlement resolves only claims about Anthropic's past conduct in acquiring and copying pirated books. It sets no ceiling on what authors can pursue going forward—against Anthropic for any future conduct or output-based claims, or in the many other pending cases against AI companies that trained on authors' works without permission or payment. What it does establish, resoundingly, is that downloading authors' books from pirate websites at an industrial scale carries a hefty price tag.

The Authors Guild will continue to monitor the distribution process and keep members informed. Authors with questions about their claims can consult the settlement website at anthropiccopyrightsettlement.com or email the settlement administrators at info@anthropiccopyrightsettlement.com . Authors Guild members can contact the Guild's legal team.