

CBS Sued Over 'Judge Judy's \$47M Salary & Profits From Syndicated Series



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by **Dominic Patten**
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UPDATE with [Judge Judy Sheindlin statement](#): This certainly won't end up in *Judge Judy's* court, but a scathing multimillion-dollar lawsuit filed today against CBS has no-nonsense host Judy Sheindlin, her syndicated series and its spinoff *Hot Bench* in the legal spotlight. Seeking widespread unspecified damages, plaintiff [Rebel Entertainment Partners](#) claims that it has been denied contractually obligated payments since 2010 from the net profits of the 19-season CBS Television-distributed *Judge Judy* because it supposedly is "losing money," while paying Judge Judy herself up to \$47 million a year.

Sheindlin's payout may be at the core of the suit, but she is not a defendant.

"According to Defendants, in the six-month accounting period prior to Scheindlin's pay raise, the Show reported net profits of \$3,572,195, of which 5% (\$178,609) was paid to Rebel," alleges the successor-in-interest to the talent agency that originally packaged the Judy Sheindlin-fronted series. Having received regular payments over the years until 2010, Rebel claims that *Judge Judy* has grossed over \$1.7 billion since it first went on the air in 1996.

"In the six-month accounting period after Scheindlin's pay raise, however, Defendants reported net profits of *negative* \$3,195,217, of which 5% (*negative* \$159,761) was allocated to Rebel." The breach of contract complaint filed in L.A. Superior Court on Monday ([read it here](#)) also claims more shell-gaming by CBS Studios, CBS Corporation, and producers and CBS TV Studios-owned Big Ticket

Entertainment. "Defendants further reduced Rebel's net profits by licensing the Show to CBS's corporate affiliates — television stations owned or operated by CBS — for below-market fees in transactions that were not negotiated at arms-length," they add.

Sheindlin re-upped with CBS TV in 2013 and [then in 2015 inked an extended deal to see her on Judge Judy until 2020](#). CBS did not respond to request for comment on today's lawsuit.

"Not content with simply wiping out Rebel's net profits, Defendants breached other contractual obligations as well," the 10-page filing does additionally comment. "For example, Defendants are required to discuss in good faith with Rebel a packaging fee for any 'spin-off, remake, sequel or episodic television series' derived from the Show," amplifies the jury-seeking complaint, in language reminiscent of CAA and Frank Darabont's lawsuit against AMC over profits from *The Walking Dead*.

"However, when Defendants created the show *Hot Bench*, which the director of programming at one CBS affiliate station called 'a spin-off from Judge Judy Sheindlin,' no one approached Rebel to discuss a packaging fee."



"Moreover, Scheindlin personally contacted Leslie Moonves, then-President and Chief Executive Officer of defendant CBS Corp., and lobbied him to put *Hot Bench* on the air," declares the complaint of the three-judge series that debuted in September 2014. "Defendants claim that *Hot Bench* is not a *Judge Judy* spin-off, despite the fact that it was created by Scheindlin, is produced and distributed by the same companies as *Judge Judy*, employs many of the same

producers and directors as *Judge Judy*, and the original name of *Judge Judy* was, in fact, 'Hot Bench.' "

With all that, it is the more than \$47 million being paid to the former Manhattan family court judge that makes up the heart of this action. "This figure is grossly inconsistent with customary practice in the television industry, as the next-highest salaries in non-scripted television at that time were David Letterman (\$28 million), Jay Leno (\$25 million), and Conan O'Brien (\$10 million)," the paperwork from Rebel lawyers Freedman + Taitelman, LLP says of the \$45 million Judge Judy was being paid as of early 2010.

"And in 2013, when Scheindlin was reportedly receiving \$47 million annually, no one else came close, as the next highest salaries in non-scripted television were Jon Stewart (\$30 million), Matt Lauer (\$25 million), and Jay Leno (\$20 million), they add with more late-night and early-morning math. "In making this deal with Scheindlin, Defendants blithely ignored their contractual obligations to Rebel. As a result, almost immediately after Scheindlin's pay raise, Rebel's backend compensation nosedived."

"By using other people's money to pay for Judge Judy's exorbitant salary, CBS has acted in extreme bad faith and in a manner that is not in any way reasonable or consistent with industry practices," attorney Bryan Freedman told Deadline today. "Even *Judge Judy* would rule against CBS in this case."

Rebel is represented by Freedman and Jordan Susman in the action. Full disclosure: Freedman has acted for PMC, Deadline's parent company, in a number of legal matters.

Here is Sheindlin's response to the suit today:

"The fact that Richard Lawrence is complaining about my salary is actually hilarious. I met Mr. Lawrence for 2 hours some twenty-one years ago. Neither I nor anyone involved in the day-to-day production of my program has heard from him in 20 years. Not a card, not a gift, not a flower, not a congratulations. Yet he has somehow received over \$17,000,000 from my program. My rudimentary math translates that into \$8,500,000 an hour for Mr. Lawrence. Not a bad payday. Now complaining about not getting enough money, that's real chutzpah! Since I have not spoken with Mr. Lawrence in over 20 years to suggest that he had any involvement in my creating *Hot Bench* is equally laughable."

