

Justices: Judge erred in ordering poor woman to pay costs

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OLYMPIA — Washington's Supreme Court says a lower court erred when it ordered a homeless, disabled and poor woman to pay legal financial obligations despite her limited means.

Thursday's decision reverses a Benton County District Court judge, who ordered Briana Wakefield to pay \$15 a month in costs from social security disability payments, her only source of income.

The justices said forcing Wakefield to pay would impose a hardship. They said the district court's order was contrary to both state and federal law regarding enforcement of such obligations against indigent and disabled people. They ordered her obligations be canceled.

The cities of Kennewick and Richland also agreed that Wakefield's obligations should be canceled. But they asked the high court to issue an opinion to provide guidance to others in the future.

The Washington Attorney General, the American Civil Liberties Union and others also filed briefs in support of Wakefield.