

Mother wins \$13.4 million in child support settlement from Nova Scotia developer after lengthy court battle

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PRNewsFoto / Transmedia Group Lisa Arutyunyan battled for years to get child support from a wealthy real estate developer /

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HALIFAX — A fitness model who battled for years to get child support from a wealthy real estate developer has received a \$13.4 million out-of-court settlement that her lawyers say is a deterrent to fathers who needlessly delay payments.

Sources close to the Nova Scotia and Florida cases confirmed the amount, though details of how it will be paid to Lisa Armoyan and her three children remain part of a confidentiality agreement between herself and her ex-husband.

Vrege Armoyan, a Nova Scotia businessman and developer, had been sentenced in June to four months in prison and fined for defying a Nova Scotia court order to pay child and spousal support arrears.

In her original decision, family court judge Theresa Forgeron noted that Vrege Armoyan had shifted more than \$23 million and a million-dollar yacht from the country during the acrimonious, six-year court struggle.

Forgeron said in her decision that Armoyan “abused the legal process for his own purposes,” and had taken a “scorched earth approach.”

“Warnings, rebukes, censures, and a contempt application have not curbed Mr. Armoyan’s errant behaviour,” she wrote at the time.

Trial lawyer for Lisa Armoyan, Harold Niman, says the settlement completed Tuesday should signal to spouses that it’s unwise to needlessly delay support payments through court processes.

“It means that people should try to settle their affairs reasonably, much sooner and not spend as much money on lawyers,” he said. “It should be viewed as being cautionary.” The delays caused much higher legal fees than might otherwise have been necessary, he added. He praised Forgeron for her role in the case, calling her a “terrific, dedicated judge” whose decision was critical in bringing the case to a conclusion.

Forgeron had noted in her decision earlier this year that prior to her contempt finding that Vrege Armoyan had left North America, while his former wife struggled to get by in poor accommodations in Boca Raton, Florida, borrowing money from her family and relying on credit.

Niman said the settlement means that his client, her three children and Vrege Armoyan can move on and live with a greater sense of security.

Leigh Davis, the Halifax lawyer for Lisa Armoyan, said the settlement also means that Vrege Armoyan can return to Canada or the United States without facing arrest or fines.

Charles Lichtman, a Florida-based lawyer who represented the businessman, said his client is still overseas but is pleased with the outcome. “If people are going to be creative and put their heads together, they can solve almost any problem and I think that’s what happened here,” he said in an interview. The lawyer said the agreement ensured the children were looked after “in a very significant way.”

Rollie Thompson, a family law expert at Dalhousie University’s law school, said he believes the settlement is among the largest in Atlantic Canada. He agreed with Niman that the case may be useful to judges in similar circumstances, but he also raised questions about whether it will serve to deter others from dragging out proceedings.

“The difficulty in family law is that it’s not always rational behaviour ... that is one of the problems with deterrence,” he said.