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— Essex County Register of Deeds John O'Brien suddenly finds himself with no less than the state's Supreme Judicial Court in his corner in his campaign to require banks to file the required papers when financing real-estate transactions.

For years, some of the nation's bigger banks have attempted to bypass local registries by filing papers with an agency they created called the Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems Inc. (MERS).

But earlier this month, in a 6-0 decision, the SJC upheld a state Land Court decision voiding a bank's attempt to foreclose on two Springfield properties for lack of proper proof of ownership. The decision was hailed by O'Brien, who said it sent a clear message "that these major banks must follow the same laws as everyone else."

The MERS system not only allows banks to avoid the normal filing fees but, being owned and operated by them, tilts the foreclosure process in their favor. That will no longer be the case in Massachusetts where the high court has held that in order to foreclose, banks must possess the proper documentation to show legal title to a piece of property.