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What's In a Sandwich? McDonalds Sued in Consumer Class Action Over McRib Claims.

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The iconic McRib, a limited-time fan favorite, recently ignited a high-profile sandwich controversy, leading to a class action lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois (*see Le, et al. v. McDonald's Corp.*, Case No. 1:25-cv-15609). The plaintiffs argue that McDonald's engaged in deceptive marketing practices in violation of a host of state laws by misrepresenting to consumers that the McRib contains pork rib meat. McDonald's hasn't yet filed a formal response, but it has stated that the lawsuit distorts the facts and that it plans to move to dismiss the complaint soon.

The McRib is a boneless pork sandwich introduced by McDonald's in 1981. The sandwich is shaped to resemble a rack of ribs, more or less, and the name McRib of course clearly references ribs. Yet the sandwich does not contain any rib meat. It is a pork patty formed with lower-grade meat parts, slathered in BBQ sauce, and served with pickles and onions on a hoagie-style bun. It is also one of the most expensive single items on the McDonald's menu, costing up to \$7.89 before tax. Despite its cost – or perhaps because of it – the McRib is enormously popular, boasting a cult-like following that few competitive offerings can match.

The plaintiffs contend that they were misled because, viewing the name “McRib,” the rib-like shape of the meat patty, the high price point relative to the rest of the menu, and the limited-time availability of the product, they concluded that the McRib contains real rib meat. Accordingly, they filed suit and seek a wide range of relief, including actual and punitive damages, legal fees, injunctive relief, and more.

Underlying plaintiffs' theory are two core questions: would a reasonable consumer think that McRib is made with rib meat, and does that matter enough to impact a reasonable consumer's purchasing decision? In attacking these questions, McDonald's could rely on its numerous public disclosures about the makeup of McRib sandwich patties, as well as third-party discussions of the issue, to attack both points. It may even throw in a survey or two for good measure.

This dustup serves as a helpful reminder that even well-established products can still be susceptible to challenge under the right circumstances, and creative plaintiffs' attorneys will never miss an opportunity to challenge potential confusion – even if the product has been around for decades. Regardless of the outcome, this litigation also serves as a cautionary tale for advertisers more generally: transparency and accuracy in product descriptions are not just best practices—they are legal imperatives.

The [Kilpatrick Advertising team](#) will continue to monitor developments in this McRib case, and many others like it. For guidance based on these recent developments, please reach out.