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December 19, 2022 02:06 PM | UPDATED 15 HOURS AGO

McDonald's sued for alleged racial discrimination

ALLY MAROTTI  



AP via Bloomberg

Chris Kempczinski



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A former McDonald's executive security officer is suing the hamburger giant and its CEO, Chris Kempczinski, alleging racial discrimination in a case surrounding the fallout from [last year's text message scandal](#).

Michael Peaster, a 35-year veteran of McDonald's who most recently oversaw Kempczinski's personal security, said in the lawsuit that he was terminated Nov. 7.

Read the lawsuit below.

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The move was racially discriminatory against Peaster, a Black man, according to the lawsuit, which was filed Dec. 14 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

The lawsuit alleges that Chicago-based McDonald's retaliated against Peaster for actions he took late last year at an internal company meeting. Kempczinski had come under public scrutiny for text messages he sent to Mayor Lori Lightfoot that said the parents of two children shot and killed in Chicago "failed those kids."



Kempczinski publicly apologized for his texts and held a meeting with McDonald's corporate employees to discuss the situation. Peaster attended. When called upon during a question-and-answer portion, Peaster said that employees who agreed with Kempczinski's comments should "have empathy and compassion for the majority of families who live in tough communities," according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit said that Kempczinski did not respond to Peaster's comment during the meeting. But afterward, Peaster allegedly suffered through a hostile work environment that started in early 2022 and lasted until his termination.

"Kempczinski was sending an unmistakable message that all company

employees, even officers, were to remain silent on the subject of Kempczinski's racist texts," the lawsuit said.

McDonald's denied the allegations in a statement and said it plans to "vigorously defend against" the suit. The company also pointed out that Peaster was promoted in January—as noted in the complaint—and he was terminated "due to serious performance issues in his expanded role."

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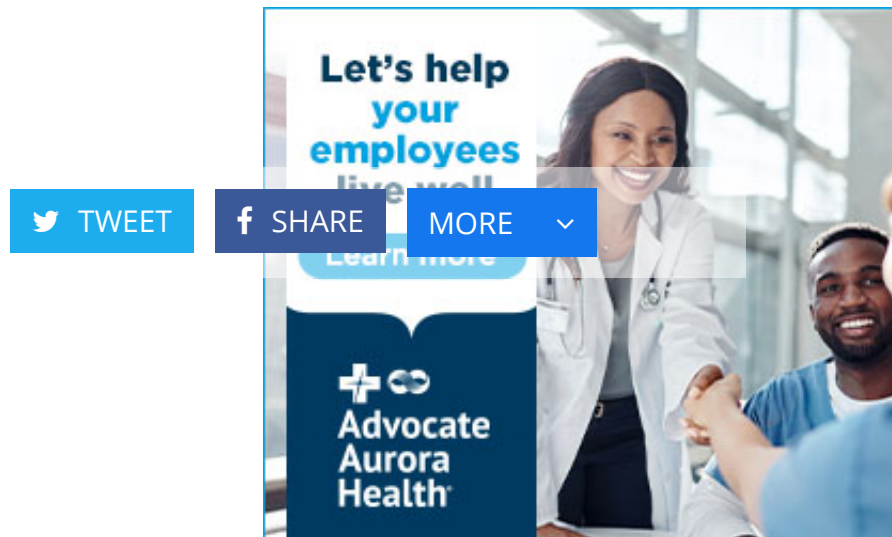
"The claims run completely afoul of the facts and the values our leadership team and company uphold," according to McDonald's statement. "To suggest that his termination was based on retaliation or anything other than performance lapses is to completely ignore the facts."

The lawsuit accuses McDonald's and Kempczinski of one count each of intentional infliction of emotional distress, unlawful retaliation, disparate treatment based on race and hostile work environment.

The lawsuit details examples of Peaster's alleged mistreatment. Last summer, he allegedly was excluded from flying on the corporate jet with Kempczinski on a trip to São Paulo and Mexico City, and was later criticized for inconveniences of flying commercial that "would have been avoided had Peaster been allowed to fly with his security clients on the company jet." Peaster also alleges in the suit that McDonald's blocked him from filling open positions in his department, despite Kempczinski's publicly [railing on Chicago's crime issues](#).

The lawsuit asks the court to award Peaster damages in an amount proven at trial,

plus costs of the suit and attorneys' fees.



Case: 1:22-cv-07037 Document #: 1 Filed: 12/14/22 Page 1 of 34 PageID #:1

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS
EASTERN DIVISION

<p>MICHAEL PEASTER</p> <p>Plaintiff,</p> <p>vs.</p> <p>McDONALD'S CORPORATION, a Delaware corporation, and CHRISTOPHER KEMPCZINSKI</p> <p>Defendants.</p>	<p>Case No. _____</p> <p>Jury Trial Demanded</p>
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COMPLAINT FOR DEPRIVATIONS OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Plaintiff, Michael Peaster, by his attorneys, Carmen D. Caruso and William B. Whitner, brings suit under the Civil Rights Act of 1870 (42 U.S.C. § 1981) against Defendants McDonald's Corporation ("McDonald's" or the "Company") and Christopher Kempczinski ("Kempczinski") to redress intentional race discrimination, disparate treatment, hostile work environment, and unlawful retaliation.

PARTIES

1. Plaintiff Michael Peaster is an African American citizen and resident of the State of Illinois residing in Naperville.
2. Defendant McDonald's Corporation is a publicly traded Delaware corporation that manages (through subsidiaries) the world-wide McDonald's restaurant system that includes both franchised and company-owned McDonald's

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1 of 34



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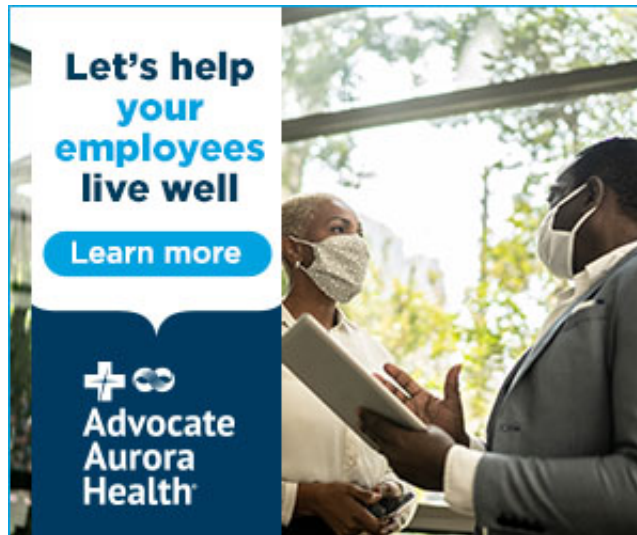
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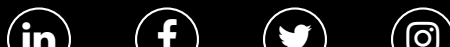
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