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## **Pool of McDonald's workers claims Mega Millions fraud**

### **14 fast-food employees say co-worker tricked state lotto to avoid sharing winnings**

By Kevin Rector, The Baltimore Sun

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A group of 14 McDonald's employees from the Baltimore area are still convinced they were winners in the massive \$656 million Mega Millions jackpot drawing earlier this year — despite being told otherwise by lottery officials — and are claiming that a co-worker defrauded the Maryland Lottery to avoid sharing a payout with them. advertisement

On Sept. 19, the group filed a civil lawsuit against their co-worker, Mirlande Wilson, a Westport woman who briefly gained celebrity status and international media attention in April after claiming to be the holder of a winning ticket purchased in Baltimore County. Two other winning tickets were purchased in Kansas and Illinois; each ticket was reportedly worth more than \$100 million in cash after taxes.

As the hype grew and the news media began staking out Wilson's home, Wilson held a bizarre news conference and eventually said she lost her ticket. Days later, lottery officials announced that the real holders of the winning Baltimore County ticket were three public school educators they dubbed the "Three Amigos."

Wilson's co-workers at McDonald's weren't convinced.

The group's lawsuit says Wilson did buy a winning ticket as part of a lottery pool the co-workers were in and that she and her lawyer, Edward Smith Jr., orchestrated an elaborate ruse to recruit the educators and trick the Maryland Lottery into believing they had won rather than Wilson.

One of the McDonald's employees, Dominique Gourdet, claims in an affidavit filed in the case that when the lottery numbers were picked March 30, he was Wilson's live-in boyfriend. Gourdet says Wilson told him multiple times that a ticket she'd purchased for the McDonald's pool had won, and that she had shown him pictures of the winning ticket with the winning numbers on her phone.

Gourdet also says Wilson told him that each of the three educators claiming to be the winners would be given \$1 million for "helping" in the scheme, while Smith would receive \$2 million.

"She advised that an arrangement was made for others to claim the prize as their own, but that in fact she had provided the ticket and that she would ultimately receive the vast bulk of the prize," Gourdet claims in his affidavit.

Gourdet's affidavit claims Wilson told him "that she did not want to share the prize with others at work, particularly the Hispanic workers."

Reached on Friday, Wilson said she never had the ticket and the claims in the lawsuit are false.

"It's not true," she said. "This is a baseless story."

Wilson declined to comment further.

On Sept. 20, Baltimore Circuit Judge John Philip Miller denied a motion by the plaintiffs requesting a temporary restraining order against Wilson, enjoining her from using or transferring lottery assets, because neither she nor her attorney was given notice of the motion, according to court documents.

But the case remains active, and the attorney for the McDonald's workers, John Yannone of [Price Benowitz](#) in Washington, has asked the court to allow two New Jersey attorneys who have experience in such cases to join the plaintiffs' legal team.

Yannone did not return multiple requests for comment.

Smith, Wilson's attorney, said in an email that Wilson "denies any knowledge of this allegation," but could not be reached for further comment.

Carole Everett, a Maryland Lottery spokeswoman, laughed out loud after being told of the lawsuit, saying it sounded like wishful thinking from a group who had their hopes unfairly raised by Wilson in the first place. The "Three Amigos" are the true winners, Everett said.

"It was verified," she said.

Everett said surveillance video from the Milford Mill 7-Eleven store where the Baltimore County ticket was purchased was reviewed by lottery officials, but she declined to further explain the lottery's ticket verification and security measures.

Because of the amount of the winnings, the Mega Millions winners were "scrutinized even more" than average lottery winners, Everett said.

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