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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

KELLY BALISTRERI and TONY MICHEL, on  
behalf of themselves and all others similarly  
situated,

Plaintiffs,

v.

McCORMICK & COMPANY, INC.,

Defendant.

Case No.

**CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT**

**JURY TRIAL DEMANDED**

1 Plaintiffs Kelly Balistreri and Tony Michel (collectively “Plaintiffs”), individually and on  
2 behalf of all others similarly situated, allege the following against Defendant McCormick &  
3 Company, Inc. (“McCormick” or “Defendant”) on information and belief, except that Plaintiffs’  
4 allegations as to their own actions are based on personal knowledge.

5 **NATURE OF THE ACTION**

6 1. This action seeks to recover damages and remedy Defendant’s continuing failure to  
7 warn individuals that certain McCormick & Company, Inc. herbs and spices sold under the brand  
8 name “McCormick,” including McCormick’s Culinary Ground Basil, Ground Ginger, Ground  
9 Oregano, Paprika, Ground Thyme, and Ground Turmeric (collectively, the “Products”) expose  
10 consumers to heightened levels of toxic heavy metals, including lead, arsenic, and cadmium.

11 2. A November 2021 report by Consumer Reports reveals that certain brands of herbs  
12 and spices, including Defendant’s Products, are tainted with significant levels of toxic heavy metals.

13 3. Heightened levels of toxic heavy metals in foods can cause cancer and serious and  
14 often irreversible damage to brain development as well as other serious health problems. Although  
15 this action does not allege a claim under California’s Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement  
16 Act of 1986 (“Proposition 65”), the amount of toxic heavy metals found in the Products violates that  
17 statute too.

18 4. As described more fully below, consumers who purchase the Products are injured by  
19 Defendant’s acts and omissions concerning the presence of heightened levels of toxic heavy metals.  
20 No reasonable consumer would know, or have reason to know, that the Products contain heightened  
21 levels of heavy metals. Worse, as companies across the industry have adopted methods to limit  
22 heavy metals in their herbs and spices, Defendant has stood idly by with a reckless disregard for its  
23 consumers’ health and well-being. As such, Plaintiffs seek relief in this action individually and as a  
24 class action on behalf of all purchasers of the Products.

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**PARTIES**

5. Plaintiff Kelly Balistreri is a resident of Carmel, California and a citizen of the State of California. Ms. Balistreri purchased Defendant’s Paprika in approximately the spring of 2019 from a Safeway located in Carmel, California. Had Defendant disclosed on the label that the Product contained unsafe levels of toxic heavy metals, Ms. Balistreri would have been aware of that fact and would not have purchased the Product. After learning of the high levels of toxic heavy metals, Ms. Balistreri stopped purchasing the Product. However, Ms. Balistreri regularly visits stores where Defendant’s products are sold and remains interested in purchasing healthy, safe herbs and spices for her and her family. She remains very much interested in purchasing Defendant’s herbs and spices.

6. Plaintiff Tony Michel is a resident of San Jose, California and a citizen of the State of California. Mr. Michel purchased several of the Products numerous times during the Class Period, including Culinary Ground Basil, Ground Oregano, Ground Thyme, and Paprika from a Walmart and Safeway retail store located in San Jose, California as recently as approximately October 2021. Had Defendant disclosed on the label that the Products contained unsafe levels of toxic heavy metals, Mr. Michel would have been aware of that fact and would not have purchased the Products. After learning of the high levels of toxic heavy metals, Mr. Michel stopped purchasing the Products. However, Mr. Michel regularly visits stores where Defendant’s products are sold and remains interested in purchasing healthy, safe herbs and spices for he and his family. He remains very much interested in purchasing Defendant’s herbs and spices.

7. Defendant McCormick is a foreign corporation with its headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland. Defendant manufactures, markets, and sells herbs and spices throughout California and the United States.

**JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

8. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to the Class Action Fairness Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-2 Stat. 4 (“CAFA”), which, *inter alia*, amends 28 U.S.C. § 1332, at new subsection (d), conferring federal jurisdiction over class actions where, as here: (a)

1 there are 100 or more members in the proposed classes; (b) some members of the proposed classes  
 2 have a different citizenship from Defendant; and (c) the claims of the proposed class members exceed  
 3 the sum or value of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) in aggregate. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1332(d)(2) and  
 4 (6).

5 9. Venue is proper in this Court under 28 U.S.C. § 1391 because Defendant transacts  
 6 significant business within this District, Plaintiffs reside within this District, and a substantial part of  
 7 the events giving rise to Plaintiffs' claims took place within this District.

### 8 **FACTS COMMON TO ALL CAUSES OF ACTION**

#### 9 **I. Lead And Arsenic Are Toxic**

10 10. Lead, arsenic, and cadmium are heavy metals. The harmful effects of heavy metals  
 11 are well-documented, particularly on children. Exposure puts children at risk for lowered IQ,  
 12 behavioral problems (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), type 2 diabetes, and cancer,  
 13 among other health issues. Heavy metals also pose risks to adults. Even modest amounts of heavy  
 14 metals can increase the risk of cancer, cognitive and reproductive problems, and other adverse  
 15 conditions. Because the average person comes into contact with heavy metals many times and from  
 16 many sources, it is important to limit exposure.

17 11. "No amount of lead is known to be safe."<sup>1</sup> Exposure to lead may cause anemia,  
 18 weakness, and kidney and brain damage.<sup>2</sup> Lead can affect almost every organ and system in the  
 19 body. Lead accumulates in the body over time, and can lead to health risks and toxicity, including  
 20 inhibiting neurological function, anemia, kidney damage, seizures, and in extreme cases, coma and  
 21 death. Lead can also cross the fetal barrier during pregnancy, exposing the mother and developing  
 22 fetus to serious risks, including reduced growth and premature birth. Lead exposure is also harmful  
 23 to adults as more than 90 percent of the total body burden of lead is accumulated in the bones, where  
 24

25  
 26 <sup>1</sup> *See* <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/13/489825051/lead-levels-below-epa-limits-can-still-impact-your-health> (last accessed Jan. 17, 2022).

27 <sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Problems Caused by Lead," *The National*  
 28 *Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)*,  
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/lead/health.html#:~:text=Exposure%20to%20high%20levels%20of,a%20developing%20baby's%20nervous%20system>. (last accessed Jan. 17, 2022).

1 it is stored. Lead in bones may be released into the blood, re-exposing organ systems long after the  
2 original exposure.<sup>3</sup>

3 12. Arsenic is also dangerous to humans. “Arsenic is ranked first among toxicants posing  
4 a significant potential threat to human health based on known or suspected toxicity.”<sup>4</sup> Long term  
5 exposure is linked to cardiovascular disease. Arsenic can also cause bladder, lung, liver, and skin  
6 cancer, and strokes and diabetes. Recent studies have suggested that arsenic may cause IQ deficits  
7 in children and may be harmful to fetal development as “even low concentrations of arsenic impair  
8 neurological function[.]”<sup>5</sup> There is “essentially no safe level” of arsenic.<sup>6</sup>

9 13. Cadmium is similarly harmful. “[A]ny cadmium exposure should be avoided.”<sup>7</sup>  
10 Exposure to cadmium may lead to damage to kidneys, lungs, and bones.<sup>8</sup> “Even relatively low  
11 chronic exposure can cause irreversible renal tubule damage, potentially progressing to glomerular  
12 damage and kidney failure” and “bone loss often is seen in concert with these effects.”<sup>9</sup> This metal  
13 is also known to cause cancer and targets the body’s cardiovascular, renal, gastrointestinal,  
14 neurological, reproductive, and respiratory systems.<sup>10</sup>

15 14. The People of the State of California declared by initiative under Proposition 65 their  
16 right “[t]o be informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other  
17 reproductive harm.” Proposition 65, § 1(b). To effectuate this goal, California’s Proposition 65,  
18

19 <sup>3</sup> State of New York Department of Health, “Lead Exposure in Adults: A Guide for Health Care  
20 Providers,” <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2584.pdf> (last accessed Jan. 17, 2022).

21 <sup>4</sup> Christina R. Tyler and Andrea M. Allan, “The Effects of Arsenic Exposure on Neurological and  
22 Cognitive Dysfunction in Human and Rodent Studies: A Review,” *Curr Environ Health Rep.* 2014;  
1(2): 132-147, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4026128/> (last accessed Jan. 17,  
2022).

23 <sup>5</sup> *Id.*

24 <sup>6</sup> See <https://publicintegrity.org/environment/what-to-do-if-your-drinking-water-contains-arsenic/>  
(last accessed Jan. 17, 2022).

25 <sup>7</sup> M. Nathaniel Mead, “Cadmium Confusion: Do Consumers Need Protection,” *Environ Health*  
26 *Perspect.* 2010 Dec; 118(12): A528-A534,  
27 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3002210/> (last accessed Jan. 17, 2022).

28 <sup>8</sup> See Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, “ToxFAQs for Cadmium,” Toxic  
Substances Portal,

<https://wwwn.cdc.gov/TSP/ToxFAQs/ToxFAQsDetails.aspx?faqid=47&toxid=15> (last accessed  
Jan. 17, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Mead, *supra* note 9.

<sup>10</sup> See Occupational Safety & Health, “Cadmium,” <https://www.osha.gov/cadmium> (last accessed  
Jan. 17, 2022).

1 Health & Safety Code § 25249.5, *et seq.*, prohibits exposing people to chemicals listed by the State  
2 of California as known to cause cancer, birth defects or other reproductive harm above certain levels  
3 without a “clear and reasonable warning,” unless the business responsible for the exposure can prove  
4 that it fits within a statutory exemption.

5 15. Lead and lead compounds are subject to the clear and reasonable warning requirement  
6 regarding carcinogens under Proposition 65. Specifically, a Proposition 65 warning is required  
7 where a total daily intake of lead exceeds .5 mcg.

8 16. Arsenic and arsenic compounds are also subject to the clear and reasonable warning  
9 requirement regarding carcinogens under Proposition 65. Specifically, a Proposition 65 warning is  
10 required where a total daily intake of arsenic exceeds 0.5 mcg.

11 17. Cadmium and cadmium compounds are likewise subject to the clear and reasonable  
12 warning requirement regarding carcinogens under Proposition 65. Specifically, a Proposition 65  
13 warning is required where a total daily intake of cadmium exceeds 0.5 mcg.

14 18. This Complaint does not allege a violation of Proposition 65. Proposition 65 is  
15 relevant, however, to the extent it provides information concerning the material omissions in  
16 violation of California’s Consumer Protection laws, and guidance as to a reasonable consumer’s  
17 purchasing decisions. Reasonable consumers purchased the Products believing, among other things,  
18 that they complied with all applicable California regulations and were safe according to California  
19 regulatory thresholds. Reasonable consumers would not have purchased the Products if they had  
20 known that they contained heightened levels of lead, arsenic, and cadmium or they would have  
21 purchased them on different terms. Because the presence of lead, arsenic, and cadmium pertain to  
22 safety, Defendant had a duty to disclose that its products contained heightened levels of lead, arsenic,  
23 and cadmium independent of any duty imposed by Proposition 65.

24 **II. McCormick’s Herbs & Spices Contain Heightened Levels Of Arsenic, Lead, and**  
25 **Cadmium**

26 19. In November of 2021, Consumer Reports published a report titled “Your Herbs and  
27 Spices Might Contain Arsenic, Cadmium, and Lead.” Employing the Analysis for Arsenic,  
28 Cadmium, Lead, and Mercury by Triple Quadruple Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry

1 (IC-QQQ-MS), With Collision Cell, Consumer Reports determined that each of the Products contain  
2 sufficient levels of toxic metals as to render them unsafe for human consumption. Consumer  
3 Reports' samples were prepared and analyzed in accordance with the Association of Official  
4 Analytical Chemists (AOAC) Method 2015.01.

5 20. Consumer Reports analyzed “126 individual products from national and private-label  
6 brands, such as Great Value (Walmart), La Flor, McCormick, Penzeys, Spice Islands, and Trader  
7 Joe's.”<sup>11</sup>

8 21. Consumer Reports determined that “[r]oughly one-third of the tested products, 40 in  
9 total, had high enough levels of arsenic, lead, and cadmium combined, on average, to pose a health  
10 concern for children when regularly consumed in typical serving sizes. Most raised concern for  
11 adults, too.”<sup>12</sup>

12 22. The authors cautioned that “just one serving—3/4 teaspoons or more—per day leaves  
13 little room for heavy metal exposure from other sources” including in “fruit juice, baby food, and  
14 rice[.]”<sup>13</sup> These latter food categories have also tested high for heavy metals and have been the  
15 subject of numerous lawsuits.

16 23. With regards to the results, James E. Rogers, PhD, director of food safety and testing  
17 at Consumer Reports remarked that “[w]hen people think about heavy metals in their diet, if they do  
18 at all, it's probably the lead in their drinking water or arsenic in their children's fruit juices or cereals  
19 . . . But our tests show that dried herbs and spices can be a surprising, and worrisome, source for  
20 children and adults.”<sup>14</sup>

21 24. Concerning the source of the heavy metals in herbs and spices, Consumer Reports  
22 stated that heavy metals may get into food, “including herbs and spices, during manufacturing—  
23 from processing equipment or packaging[.]”<sup>15</sup>

24  
25 <sup>11</sup> Lisa L. Gill, “Your Herbs and Spices Might Contain Arsenic, Cadmium, and Lead,” *Consumer*  
26 *Reports* (Nov. 9, 2021), [https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/your-herbs-and-spices-](https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/your-herbs-and-spices-might-contain-arsenic-cadmium-and-lead/)  
might-contain-arsenic-cadmium-and-lead/ (last accessed Dec. 21, 2021).

27 <sup>12</sup> *Id.*

28 <sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

1           25. Along these lines, Consumer Reports determined that “it is possible for herb and spice  
2 companies to limit heavy metals in their products” as “[a]bout two-thirds of the spices [Consumer  
3 Reports] tested did not have concerning levels of heavy metals.”<sup>16</sup>

4           26. Yet, Defendant fails to test for heavy metals. This is despite the fact that other  
5 companies such as Bolner’s Fiesta and Wadi Al Akhdar do perform such tests.

6           27. Accordingly, provided this industry standard, Defendant would have had the  
7 knowledge that it could test for heavy metals, but it did not, and that it could safely remove these  
8 metals from its herbs and spices, but, again, did not.

9           28. Instead, Defendant chose to ignore the health of the consuming public in pursuit of  
10 profit.

11 **III. The High Presence of Toxic Heavy Metals In McCormick’s Herbs And Spices Far**  
12 **Exceeds Consumer Expectations**

13           29. According to Global Market Insights, “[t]he demand for spices and seasonings has  
14 increased in recent years owing to their varied nutritional benefits.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, “[m]ore Americans  
15 are considering the use of spices and herbs for medicinal and therapeutic/remedy use, especially for  
16 various chronic conditions” as “[t]here is now ample evidence that spices and herbs possess  
17 antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antitumorigenic, anticarcinogenic, and glucose-and cholesterol -  
18 lowering activities as well as properties that affect cognition and mood.”<sup>18</sup> As such, the safety of  
19 herbs and spices that can be easily purchased to season such food, amongst others, is a material fact  
20 to consumers (such as Plaintiffs and the Class members).

21           30. More specifically, given the negative effects of toxic heavy metals (such as arsenic,  
22 lead, and cadmium) on child development and adult health, the presence of these substances in food  
23 is a material fact to consumers (such as Plaintiffs and members of the Class). Indeed, consumers—  
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25 <sup>16</sup> *Id.*

26 <sup>17</sup> Global Market Insights, “North America Seasonings Market to Exceed \$5bn by 2027,” *Press*  
27 *Releases* (Oct. 22, 2021), [https://www.gminsights.com/pressrelease/north-america-seasonings-](https://www.gminsights.com/pressrelease/north-america-seasonings-market?utm_source=globenewswire.com&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=Paid_globenewswire)  
28 *market?utm\_source=globenewswire.com&utm\_medium=referral&utm\_campaign=Paid\_globenew-*  
*swire* (last accessed Jan. 17, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> T Alan Jiang, “Health Benefits of Culinary Herbs and Spices,” *JAOAC Int.* 2019 Mar 1; 102(2):  
395-411, 10.5740/jaoacint.18-0418 (last accessed Jan. 17, 2022).



1 such as Plaintiffs and members of the Class—are unwilling to purchase foods that contains elevated  
2 levels of toxic heavy metals.

3 31. Defendant knows that the safety of its herbs and spices (as a general matter) is a  
4 material fact to consumers.

5 32. Defendant also knows that consumers (such as Plaintiffs and members of the Class)  
6 are unwilling to purchase their respective brands of herbs and spices that contain elevated levels of  
7 toxic heavy metals.

8 33. As such, Defendant also knows that the presence of toxic heavy metals in its herbs  
9 and spices is a material fact to consumers (such as Plaintiffs and the Class members).

10 34. Herbs and spices manufacturers (such as Defendant) hold a special position of public  
11 trust. Consumers believe that they would not sell products that are unsafe.

12 35. Defendant knew that if the elevated levels of toxic heavy metals in its herbs and spices  
13 was disclosed to Plaintiffs and the Class members, then Plaintiffs and the Class members would be  
14 unwilling to purchase them.

15 36. In light of Defendant’s respective knowledge that Plaintiffs and the Class members  
16 would be unwilling to purchase the Products if they knew that those brands of herbs and spices  
17 contained elevated levels of toxic heavy metals, Defendant intentionally and knowingly concealed  
18 this fact from Plaintiffs and the Class members and did not disclose the presence of these toxic heavy  
19 metals on the labels of the Products.

20 37. Defendant knew that Plaintiffs and the Class members would rely upon the  
21 representations and omissions contained on the packages of the Products and intended for them to  
22 do so.

23 38. Defendant knew that in relying upon the representations and omissions contained on  
24 the packages of the Products (respectively), Plaintiffs and the Class members would view those  
25 products as being safe for consumption, given their represented lack of certain deleterious substances  
26 (e.g., BPA, GMOs), and Defendant’s concealment of the fact that those brands of herbs and spices  
27 contained elevated levels of toxic heavy metals.  
28



1           46. Plaintiffs also seek to represent a Subclass of all Class Members who purchased the  
2 Products in California (the “Subclass”).

3           47. At this time, Plaintiffs do not know the exact number of members of the Class;  
4 however, given the nature of the claims and the number of retail stores in the United States selling  
5 the Products, Plaintiffs believe that the Class members are so numerous that joinder of all members  
6 is impracticable.

7           48. There is a well-defined community of interest in the questions of law and fact  
8 involved in this case. Questions of law and fact common to the members of the Class and Subclass  
9 that predominate over questions that may affect individual Class members include:

- 10           a. whether the Products contain toxic heavy metals;
- 11           b. whether Defendant’s conduct is unethical, oppressive, unscrupulous, and/or  
12           substantially injurious to consumers;
- 13           c. whether the amount of toxic heavy metals in the Products is material to a reasonable  
14           consumer;
- 15           d. whether Defendant had a duty to disclose that its Products had heightened levels of  
16           toxic heavy metals;
- 17           e. whether Plaintiffs and members of the Class are entitled to injunctive and other  
18           equitable relief;
- 19           f. whether Defendant failed to disclose material facts concerning the Products;
- 20           g. whether Defendant’s conduct was unfair and/or deceptive;
- 21           h. whether Defendant has been unjustly enriched as a result of the unlawful, fraudulent,  
22           and unfair conduct alleged in this Complaint such that it would be inequitable for  
23           Defendant to retain the benefits conferred upon Defendant by Plaintiffs and the Class  
24           members;
- 25           i. whether Defendant breached implied warranties to Plaintiffs and the Class members;
- 26           j. whether Plaintiffs and the Class members have sustained damages with respect to the  
27           common-law claims asserted, and if so, the proper measure of their damages.
- 28





1 violating the common law. Proposition 65 is not a predicate violation for the claim under the  
2 unlawful prong of the UCL.

3 66. By violating these laws, Defendant has engaged in unlawful business acts and  
4 practices, which constitute unfair competition within the meaning of Business & Professions Code  
5 §17200.

6 67. Plaintiffs purchased the Products in reliance on Defendant's representations that the  
7 Products were fit for consumption and based on the omissions as to the amount of toxic heavy metals  
8 contained therein. Plaintiffs would not have purchased the Products at all had they known of  
9 Defendant's omissions. Plaintiffs and the Subclass members paid money for the Products. However,  
10 Plaintiffs and the Subclass members did not obtain the full value, or any value, of the advertised  
11 products due to Defendant's omissions regarding the Products. Accordingly, Plaintiffs and the  
12 Subclass members have suffered injury in fact and lost money or property as a direct result of  
13 Defendant's material omissions.

14 68. In accordance with California Business & Professions Code §17203, Plaintiffs seek  
15 an order: (1) enjoining Defendant from continuing to conduct business through its fraudulent  
16 conduct; and (2) requiring Defendant to conduct a corrective advertising campaign.

17 69. As a result of Defendant's conduct, Plaintiffs seek restitution, disgorgement, and  
18 injunctive relief under California Business & Professions Code §17203.

19 **THIRD COUNT**

20 **(Violations of California Business & Professions Code §17200, *et seq.*,  
21 Based on Unfair Acts and Practices)**

22 70. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference the foregoing paragraphs of this Complaint as if  
23 fully stated herein.

24 71. Plaintiffs bring this claim individually and on behalf of the Subclass members.

25 72. Under Business & Professions Code §17200, any business act or practice that is  
26 unethical, oppressive, unscrupulous, and/or substantially injurious to consumers, or that violates a  
27 legislatively declared policy, constitutes an unfair business act or practice.

1           73. Defendant has engaged, and continues to engage, in conduct which is immoral,  
2 unethical, oppressive, unscrupulous, and/or substantially injurious to consumers. This conduct  
3 includes failing to disclose that the Products contain heightened levels of toxic heavy metals.

4           74. Defendant has engaged, and continue to engage, in conduct that violates the  
5 legislatively declared policies of: (1) California Civil Code §§1572, 1573, 1709, 1710, 1711 against  
6 committing fraud and deceit; (2) California Civil Code §1770 against committing acts and practices  
7 intended to deceive consumers regarding the representation of goods in certain particulars; (3)  
8 California Health & Safety Code §110660 and 21 U.S.C. §321 against misbranding food.  
9 Proposition 65 is not a predicate violation for the claim under the unfair prong of the UCL. Defendant  
10 gained an unfair advantage over its competitors, whose labeling, advertising, and marketing for other  
11 similar products must comply with these laws.

12           75. Defendant's conduct is substantially injurious to consumers. Such conduct has  
13 caused, and continues to cause, substantial injury to consumers because consumers would not have  
14 purchased the Products at all but for Defendant's omissions regarding the levels of toxic heavy metals  
15 contained in the Products. Such injury is not outweighed by any countervailing benefits to consumers  
16 or competition. Indeed, no benefit to consumers or competition results from Defendant's conduct.  
17 Since consumers reasonably rely on Defendant's representations, and thus also their omissions, and  
18 injury results from ordinary use of the Products, consumers could not have reasonably avoided such  
19 injury. *Davis v. Ford Motor Credit Co.*, 179 Cal. App. 4th 581, 597-98 (2009); *see also Drum v.*  
20 *San Fernando Valley Bar Ass'n*, 182 Cal. App. 4th 247, 257 (2010) (outlining the third test based on  
21 the definition of "unfair" in Section 5 of the FTC Act).

22           76. By committing the acts alleged above, Defendant has engaged in unfair business acts  
23 and practices which constitute unfair competition within the meaning of Business & Professions  
24 Code §17200.

25           77. Plaintiffs purchased the Products believing them to be fit for consumption due to its  
26 omissions regarding the heightened levels of toxic heavy metals in the Products. Plaintiffs would  
27 not have purchased the Products at all but for Defendant failing to disclose that they contained toxic  
28

1 heavy metals. Plaintiffs and the Subclass members paid money for the Products. However, Plaintiffs  
2 and the Subclass members did not obtain the full value of the advertised products due to Defendant's  
3 omissions regarding the nature of said Products. Accordingly, Plaintiffs and the Subclass members  
4 suffered an injury in fact and lost money or property as a direct result of Defendant's material  
5 omissions.

6 78. In accordance with California Business & Professions Code §17203, Plaintiffs seek  
7 an order enjoining Defendant from continuing to conduct business through its fraudulent conduct  
8 and further seeks an order requiring Defendant to conduct a corrective advertising campaign.

9 79. As a result of Defendant's conduct, Plaintiffs seek restitution, disgorgement, and  
10 injunctive relief under California Business & Professions Code §17203.

11 **FOURTH COUNT**  
12 **(Violations of the California Consumer Legal Remedies Act)**

13 80. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference the foregoing paragraphs of Complaint as if fully  
14 stated herein.

15 81. Plaintiffs bring this claim individually and on behalf of the Subclass members.

16 82. Plaintiffs purchased Defendant's Products for household use.

17 83. The acts and practices of Defendant as described above were intended to deceive  
18 Plaintiffs and the Subclass members as described herein, and have resulted, and will result, in  
19 damages to Plaintiffs and members of the Subclass. These actions violated, and continue to violate,  
20 the California Consumers Legal Remedies Act ("CLRA") in at least the following respects:

21 a. In violation of California Civil Code §1770(a)(5) of the CLRA, Defendant's acts and  
22 practices constitute representations or omissions deceiving that the Products have  
23 characteristics, uses, and/or benefits, which they do not;

24 b. in violation of California Civil Code §1770(a)(7) of the CLRA, Defendant's acts and  
25 practices constitute representations that the Products are of a particular quality, which  
26 they are not; and



1 c. in violation of California Civil Code §1770(a)(9) of the CLRA, Defendant’s acts and  
2 practices constitute the advertisement of the goods in question without the intent to  
3 sell them as advertised.

4 84. By committing the acts alleged above, Defendant has violated the CLRA.

5 85. Plaintiffs and the Subclass members suffered injuries caused by Defendant’s  
6 misrepresentations and/or omissions because they were induced to purchase the Products they would  
7 not have otherwise purchased if they had known that they contained heightened levels of toxic heavy  
8 metals.

9 86. In compliance with the provisions of California Civil Code §1782, Plaintiffs sent  
10 written notice to Defendant on December 17, 2021, informing Defendant of their intention to seek  
11 damages under California Civil Code §1750, *et seq.* The letter expressly stated that it was sent on  
12 behalf of Plaintiffs and “all other persons similarly situated.” Accordingly, Plaintiffs seek damage  
13 from Defendant for its violations of the CLRA.

14 87. Plaintiffs and the Subclass members are also entitled to, pursuant to California Civil  
15 Code §1780, an order enjoining the above-described wrongful acts and practices of Defendant, and  
16 any other relief deemed appropriate and proper by the Court under California Civil Code §1780.

17  
18 **FIFTH COUNT**  
**(Breach of Implied Warranty of Merchantability)**

19 88. Plaintiffs incorporate by this reference the allegations contained in the preceding  
20 paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

21 89. Plaintiffs bring this claim individually and on behalf of the members of the Class and  
22 the proposed California Subclass against Defendant.

23 90. Under California Commercial Code § 2314, every sale of goods in California is  
24 accompanied by both a manufacturer’s and retail seller’s implied warranty that the goods are  
25 merchantable as defined by that Act.

26 91. The Products at issue here are “goods” within the meaning of California Commercial  
27 Code § 2105.

1           92. Plaintiffs and the Class members who purchased one or more of the Products are  
2 “buyer[s]” within the meaning of California Commercial Code § 2103.

3           93. Defendant is “a person who deals in goods of the kind” and “otherwise . . . holds  
4 [itself] out as having knowledge or skill peculiar to the practices or goods in the transaction” and,  
5 therefore, is a “merchant” within the meaning of California Commercial Code § 2104.

6           94. Defendant impliedly warranted to retail buyers that the Products were merchantable  
7 in that they would: (a) pass without objection in the trade or industry under the contract description,  
8 and (b) were fit for the ordinary purposes for which the Products are used. For a consumer good to  
9 be “merchantable” under the Act, it must satisfy both of these elements. Defendant breached these  
10 implied warranties because the Products were unsafe and defective. Therefore, the Products would  
11 not pass without objection in the trade or industry and were not fit for the ordinary purpose for which  
12 they are used.

13           95. Plaintiffs and the Class members purchased the Products in reliance upon Defendant’s  
14 skill and judgment in properly packaging and labeling the Products.

15           96. The Products were not altered by Plaintiffs or the Class members.

16           97. The Products were defective at the time of sale when they left the exclusive control  
17 of Defendant. The defect described in this complaint was latent in the Products and not discoverable  
18 at the time of sale.

19           98. Defendant knew that the Products would be purchased and used without additional  
20 testing by Plaintiffs and the Class members.

21           99. As a direct and proximate cause of Defendant’s breach of the implied warranty,  
22 Plaintiffs and the Class members have been injured and harmed because they would not have  
23 purchased the Products if they knew the truth about the products, namely, that they contained high  
24 levels of toxic heavy metals.

25 ///

26 ///

27 ///

**SIXTH COUNT**  
**(Breach of Implied Warranty Under the Song-Beverly Act,  
Cal. Civ. Code § 1790 *et seq.*)**

100. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference the foregoing paragraphs of this Complaint as if fully stated herein.

101. Plaintiffs bring this claim individually and on behalf of the members of the proposed Class and Subclass against Defendant.

102. Under the Song-Beverly Consumer Warranty Act, Cal. Civ. Code § 1790, *et seq.*, every sale of consumer goods in this State is accompanied by both a manufacturer's and retail seller's implied warranty that the goods are merchantable, as defined in that Act. In addition, every sale of consumer goods in this State is accompanied by both a manufacturer's and retail seller's implied warranty of fitness when the manufacturer or retailer has reason to know that the goods as represented have a particular purpose and that the buyer is relying on the manufacturer's or retailer's skill or judgment to furnish suitable goods consistent with that represented purpose.

103. The Products at issue here are "consumer goods" within the meaning of Cal. Civ. Code § 1791(a).

104. Plaintiffs and the Class members who purchased one or more of the Products are "retail buyers" within the meaning of Cal. Civ. Code § 1791.

105. Defendant is in the business of manufacturing, assembling, producing and/or selling the Products to retail buyers, and therefore are a "manufacturer" and "seller" within the meaning of Cal. Civ. Code § 1791.

106. Defendant impliedly warranted to retail buyers that the Products were merchantable in that they would: (a) pass without objection in the trade or industry under the contract description, and (b) were fit for the ordinary purposes for which the Products are used. For a consumer good to be "merchantable" under the Act, it must satisfy both of these elements. Defendant breached these implied warranties because the Products were unsafe and defective. Therefore, the Products would not pass without objection in the trade or industry and were not fit for the ordinary purpose for which they are used.





1 h. That the Court grant such other and further relief as may be just and proper.

2 **DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL**

3 Pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 38(b), Plaintiffs demand a trial by jury of any  
4 and all issues in this action so triable of right.

5  
6 Dated: January 18, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

7 **BURSOR & FISHER, P.A.**

8  
9 By: /s/ L. Timothy Fisher  
L. Timothy Fisher

10 L. Timothy Fisher (State Bar No. 191626)  
11 Sean L. Litteral (State Bar No. 331985)  
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17 *Attorneys for Plaintiffs*

**CLRA Venue Declaration Pursuant to California Civil Code Section 1780(d)**

I, L. Timothy Fisher, declare as follows:

1. I am an attorney at law licensed to practice in the State of California and a member of the bar of this Court. I am a partner at Bursor & Fisher, P.A., counsel of record for Plaintiffs Kelly Balistreri and Tony Michel in this action. Ms. Balistreri is a resident of Carmel, California. Mr. Michel is a resident of San Jose, California. I have personal knowledge of the facts set forth in this declaration and, if called as a witness, I could and would competently testify thereto under oath.

2. The Complaint filed in this action is filed in the proper place for trial under Civil Code Section 1780(d) in that a substantial portion of the events alleged in the Complaint occurred in the Northern District of California.

I declare under the penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California and the United States that the foregoing is true and correct and that this declaration was executed at Walnut Creek, California this 18th day of January 2021.

/s/ L. Timothy Fisher

L. Timothy Fisher

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS-CAND 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved in its original form by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the Clerk of Court to initiate the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS

KELLY BALISTRERI and TONY MICHEL, on behalf of themselves and all others similarly situated,

(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Monterey (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)

(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)

L. Timothy Fisher, Bursor & Fisher, P.A., 1990 N. California Blvd., Suite 940 Walnut Creek, CA 94596 Tel.: (925) 300-4455

DEFENDANTS

McCORMICK & COMPANY, INC.,

County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)

NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.

Attorneys (If Known)

II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

- 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party) 2 U.S. Government Defendant 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)

III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES (Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff and One Box for Defendant)

Table with columns for Plaintiff (PTF) and Defendant (DEF) citizenship and incorporation status. Includes options like 'Citizen of This State', 'Incorporated or Principal Place of Business In This State', etc.

IV. NATURE OF SUIT (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

Large table with columns for CONTRACT, REAL PROPERTY, TORTS, CIVIL RIGHTS, PRISONER PETITIONS, FORFEITURE/PENALTY, LABOR, IMMIGRATION, BANKRUPTCY, SOCIAL SECURITY, FEDERAL TAX SUITS, and OTHER STATUTES. Each column lists various legal categories and codes.

V. ORIGIN (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

- 1 Original Proceeding 2 Removed from State Court 3 Remanded from Appellate Court 4 Reinstated or Reopened 5 Transferred from Another District (specify) 6 Multidistrict Litigation-Transfer 8 Multidistrict Litigation-Direct File

VI. CAUSE OF ACTION

Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are filing (Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity): 28 U.S.C. § 1332(d)

Brief description of cause:

Defendant failed to disclose that their products contain heightened levels of heavy metals.

VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:

CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION UNDER RULE 23, Fed. R. Civ. P. DEMAND \$ 5,000,000.00

CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint: JURY DEMAND: X Yes No

VIII. RELATED CASE(S), IF ANY (See instructions):

JUDGE DOCKET NUMBER

IX. DIVISIONAL ASSIGNMENT (Civil Local Rule 3-2)

(Place an "X" in One Box Only) SAN FRANCISCO/OAKLAND X SAN JOSE EUREKA-MCKINLEYVILLE

DATE 01/18/2022

SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF RECORD

/s/ L. Timothy Fisher