



## Ankin Law Office LLC

Protecting the Rights of Injured Workers

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## HBO's "Hot Coffee": The Perils of Tort Reform

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Part of HBO's summer lineup includes "*Hot Coffee*," a documentary that investigates the principles behind tort reform and how it "threatens to restrict the rights of everyday citizens and undermine the civil justice system." The documentary, which aired on June 27, was directed and produced by Susan Saladoff, a former public interest lawyer and first time filmmaker.

The documentary highlights the importance of our country's civil justice system and focuses on the ways that tort reform threatens the system. The series discussed four high profile lawsuits, beginning with the infamous McDonald's "hot coffee" lawsuit in which a jury awarded Stella Liebeck \$2.86 million when she sued McDonald's after spilling hot coffee on herself in 1990 and suffering **severe burns**.

The documentary includes "man-on-the-street" interviews in which each of the respondents expressed an initial opinion that the McDonald's "hot coffee" case was egregious, at least to some degree, on the part of the plaintiff. After being shown gruesome photos of the plaintiff's burned pelvic area, however, the respondents' opinions seem to vacillate.

The series goes on to showcase three other exceptional lawsuits and political tactics: (1) the case of a 16-year-old whose severe **brain injury** was due to **medical malpractice** but whose damages were limited to only 1/5 of what the jury determined his family was owed due to the state's cap on malpractice damages; (2) the smear campaign against Justice Oliver Diaz, an anti-tort reform state supreme court justice from Mississippi; and (3) the case of a young Halliburton employee who was drugged and raped while deployed in Iraq and sought civil damages against her

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employer but was denied a jury trial due to a mandatory arbitration clause in the employment agreement she had signed.

The documentary's overarching theme focuses on how the public, consumers and voters are being fooled by the arguments of tort reform advocates. Our civil justice system and the Constitution afford us the right to a jury trial, but tort reformists are attempting to remove, or severely restrict, this right through measures such as damage caps and mandatory arbitration.

The film exposes Corporate America's manipulation of the public to think that "freeloaders" have flooded the civil justice system and that the majority of civil lawsuits are frivolous – until, that is, they have been wronged and their access to the civil court system is restricted. The Chicago personal injury lawyers at **Ankin Law Offices, LLC** are dedicated to protecting the rights of victims of personal injury, medical malpractice and other tortious conduct.

Howard Ankin of Ankin Law Office LLC ([www.ankinlaw.com](http://www.ankinlaw.com)) handles workers' compensation and personal injury cases. Mr. Ankin can be reached at (312) 346-8780 and [howard@ankinlaw.com](mailto:howard@ankinlaw.com).

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