Federal Judge Denies Zillow's Injunction in Listings Fight, Sends MRED Dispute to Arbitration

An early ruling in the antitrust battle over who decides which home listings consumers see hands MRED and Compass a procedural win — though the underlying case is far from decided.

By Nikki Snyder

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CHICAGO — A federal judge has denied Zillow's bid for a preliminary injunction in its antitrust dispute with Midwest Real Estate Data (MRED) and Compass, and ordered Zillow's claims against the Chicago-area multiple listing service into private arbitration — an early setback for the portal in a closely watched fight over which listings online platforms are required to display.

The Sept. 15 ruling from the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois is procedural rather than a decision on the merits, but it reshapes the case. Along with denying the injunction, the court granted MRED's motion to compel arbitration and paused Zillow's related claims against Compass International Holdings until that arbitration concludes. A temporary restraining order that had kept MRED's listing feed flowing to Zillow is now set to be lifted.

At the center of the lawsuit is a question with national implications: can a dominant listing portal choose which homes from an MLS feed it shows consumers, or must it display every listing the MLS distributes? Zillow filed its antitrust complaint earlier this year, alleging that MRED and Compass coordinated to pressure it into carrying Compass's privately marketed listings or risk losing access to MRED's data. MRED and Compass have characterized their arrangement as protecting seller choice and neutral MLS rules.

The dispute escalated in mid-May, when MRED briefly suspended the listing feed it supplies to Zillow — roughly 43,000 Chicago-area listings, or nearly all of the MLS's inventory — after accusing the portal of breaching its licensing agreements. A court order restored the feed within days and temporarily barred Zillow from excluding MRED listings. The two sides argued the injunction question over a two-day hearing about two months ago.

The fight over “objective criteria”

The case turns in large part on what MRED calls its “objective criteria” rule. The MLS traces the concept to a 2008 settlement between the U.S. Department of Justice and the National Association of Realtors. Under that framework, MRED says, brokers and consumers may filter listings by neutral factors such as price, location, property type, bedrooms and amenities — but may not strip out or hide competitors' listings based on subjective business preferences. Zillow has argued that its display standards promote transparency; MRED contends that letting a portal omit rival listings would undermine the cooperative sharing that multiple listing services are built on.

All sides claim ground

Each party framed the outcome on its own terms. MRED called the ruling a victory for MLSs, brokers and, in its words, “the cooperative marketplace nationwide,” saying it affirms an MLS's ability to enforce its data-licensing rules even against a large, publicly traded company. A Compass spokesperson called the decision a win for competition and consumers, arguing that “choice belongs to the homeowner.”

Zillow, in a post on its company news blog, stressed that the decision was “not a final ruling” on its antitrust claims and signaled it would keep fighting, describing the outcome as a temporary step back for Chicago-area buyers and sellers.

A wider antitrust spotlight

The case is unfolding alongside broader scrutiny of private listing networks. In early August, a U.S. House Judiciary antitrust subcommittee askeCompass and MRED to answer questions about their use of private listing networks and their data partnership, part of a review of whether such structures shield companies from competition at consumers' expense.

Because Zillow's claims against MRED now head to private arbitration, much of the next phase is likely to play out outside public view, which could limit the guidance the dispute offers other MLSs, portals and brokerages. Observers say the outcome underscores how MLS data-licensing terms and display rules have become central battlegrounds between listing platforms and brokerage-aligned data infrastructure.

What it means for buyers and sellers

For consumers, the fight is ultimately about listing visibility — how many of the homes actually for sale appear on the platform where someone happens to be searching, and who sets those rules. As portals, MLSs and brokerages keep testing those boundaries in court and arbitration, what shows up in an online search may depend as much on data contracts and display policies as on what is genuinely on the market.

Of course a fragmented market rooted in monopolistic practices is not good for sellers. A very real question for buyers is worthy of posing: Do you want to see every home on the MLS when you believe you are shopping in the entire market on a national estimators website?

Editor's note

Reporting is based on the Sept. 15, 2026 ruling and on public statements from the parties. Primary sources: HousingWire, RISMedia, Real Estate News and Chicago Agent Magazine, plus company statements from Zillow (its “Front Porch” news blog), MRED and Compass.