

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS

TERA DONAHUE, Plaintiff, v. NURTURE INC. DBA HAPPY FAMILY ORGANICS, Defendant.	Civil Action No. COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF
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COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

TERA DONAHUE (“Plaintiff”), by and through undersigned counsel, seeks a permanent injunction requiring a change in NURTURE INC. DBA HAPPY FAMILY ORGANICS’s (“Nurture”, and “Defendant”) corporate policies to cause its Website to become, and remain, accessible to individuals with visual disabilities. In support thereof, Plaintiff respectfully asserts as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. In a September 25, 2018 letter to U.S. House of Representative Ted Budd, U.S. Department of Justice Assistant Attorney General Stephen E. Boyd confirmed that public accommodations must make the websites they own, operate, or control equally accessible to individuals with disabilities. Assistant Attorney General Boyd’s letter provides:

The Department [of Justice] first articulated its interpretation that the ADA applies to public accommodations’ Websites over 20 years ago. This interpretation is consistent with the ADA’s title III requirement that the goods, services, privileges,

or activities provided by places of public accommodation be equally accessible to people with disabilities.¹

2. Plaintiff Donahue has retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative retinopathy disease which has progressed over many years. Plaintiff has been legally blind since 1994. Ms. Donahue uses an iPhone 6 with voice-over, and a desktop computer which runs JAWS.

3. Screen reader “software translates the visual internet into an auditory equivalent. At a rapid pace, the software reads the content of a webpage to the user.” *Andrews v. Blick Art Materials, LLC*, 17-CV-767, 2017 WL 6542466, at *6 (E.D.N.Y. Dec. 21, 2017) (J. Weinstein).

The screen reading software uses auditory cues to allow a visually impaired user to effectively use Websites. For example, when using the visual internet, a seeing user learns that a link may be “clicked,” which will bring his to another webpage, through visual cues, such as a change in the color of the text (often text is turned from black to blue). When the sighted user's cursor hovers over the link, it changes from an arrow symbol to a hand.

The screen reading software uses auditory—rather than visual—cues to relay this same information. When a sight impaired individual reaches a link that may be “clicked on,” the software reads the link to the user, and after reading the text of the link says the word “clickable.”...Through a series of auditory cues read aloud by the screen reader, the visually impaired user can navigate a Website by listening and responding with his keyboard.

Id. at *6-7.²

4. Defendant is a leader in the design, development, manufacture, and distribution of children’s nutritional products, and similar products, under its recognized brand Happy Family Organics.

¹ See Letter from Assistant Attorney General Stephen E. Boyd, U.S. Department of Justice, to Congressman Ted Budd, U.S. House of Representatives (Sept. 25, 2018) (available at <https://images.cutimes.com/contrib/content/uploads/documents/413/152136/adaletter.pdf>) (last accessed August 5, 2021).

² See American Foundation for the Blind, *Screen Readers*, available at <https://www.afb.org/node/16207/screen-readers> (last accessed August 5 2021) (discussing screen readers and how they work).

5. Consumers may purchase Defendant's products and access other brand-related content and services at <https://www.happyfamilyorganics.com/> ("Website"), the Website Defendant owns, operates, and controls.³

6. In addition to researching and purchasing Defendant's products and services from the comfort and convenience of their homes, consumers may also use Defendant's Website to contact customer service by phone and email, sign up to receive product updates, product news, and special promotions, review important legal notices like Defendant's Privacy Policy and Terms and Conditions, and more.⁴

7. Defendant is responsible for the policies, practices, and procedures concerning the Website's development and maintenance.

8. Unfortunately, Defendant denies approximately 8.1 million⁵ Americans who have difficulty seeing access to its Website's goods, content, and services because the Website is largely incompatible with the screen reader programs these Americans use to navigate an increasingly ecommerce world.

9. This discrimination is particularly acute during the current COVID-19 global pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC"), Americans living with disabilities are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 and, therefore, are

³ Nurture Privacy Policy, *available at* <https://www.happyfamilyorganics.com/californiaprivacypolicy/> (last accessed August 5, 2021).

⁴ *See, e.g.*, Nurture Home Page, *available at* <https://www.happyfamilyorganics.com/> (last accessed August 5, 2021).

⁵ Press Release, United States Census Bureau, Nearly 1 in 5 People Have a Disability in the U.S., Census Bureau Reports *Report Released to Coincide with 22nd Anniversary of the ADA* (Jul. 25, 2012), *available at* <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html> (last accessed August 5, 2021) ("About 8.1 million people had difficulty seeing, including 2.0 million who were blind or unable to see.").

recommended to shelter in place throughout the duration of the pandemic.⁶ This underscores the importance of access to online retailers, such as Defendant, for this especially vulnerable population.

10. The COVID-19 pandemic is particularly dangerous for disabled individuals.⁷ The overwhelming burden on hospitals is leading to a worry that emergency services will ration treatment. Although the Department of Health has ensured that no priority treatment will occur, disabled individuals are in fear that their diminished capacity to communicate will affect their treatment.⁸ With public health experts expecting social distancing to extend through 2022, and the uncertainty surrounding businesses transitioning back to normal operations, the importance of accessible online services has been heightened. During these unprecedented times, disabled individuals risk losing their jobs, experiencing difficulty acquiring goods and services like health care, and not having the information they need to stay safe.⁹

⁶ See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (2019)*, available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fhigh-risk-complications.html (last accessed August 5, 2021) (“Based on currently available information and clinical expertise, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.”).

⁷ See The New York Times, *‘It’s Hit Our Front Door’: Homes for the Disabled See a Surge of Covid-19 (2020)*, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/nyregion/coronavirus-disabilities-group-homes.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur> (last accessed August 5, 2021) (“As of Monday, 1,100 of the 140,000 developmentally disabled people monitored by the state had tested positive for the virus, state officials said. One hundred five had died — a rate far higher than in the general population”).

⁸ See The Atlantic, *Americans With Disabilities Are Terrified (2020)*, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/04/people-disabilities-worry-they-wont-get-treatment/609355/> (last accessed August 5, 2021) (explaining that disabled individuals are inherently more susceptible to the virus, leading to complications in hospital in which the individuals are unable to effectively communicate with doctors while intubated).

⁹ See Slate, *The Inaccessible Internet 2020*, available at <https://slate.com/technology/2020/05/disabled-digital-accessibility-pandemic.html> (last accessed August 5, 2021).

11. Plaintiff brings this civil rights action against Defendant to enforce Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, [42 U.S.C. § 12101](#) *et seq.* (“Title III”), which requires, among other things, that a public accommodation (1) not deny persons with disabilities the benefits of its services, facilities, privileges and advantages; (2) provide such persons with benefits that are equal to those provided to nondisabled persons; (3) provide auxiliary aids and services—including electronic services for use with a computer screen reading program—where necessary to ensure effective communication with individuals with a visual disability, and to ensure that such persons are not excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than sighted individuals; and (4) utilize administrative methods, practices, and policies that provide persons with disabilities equal access to online content.

12. By failing to make its Website available in a manner compatible with computer screen reader programs, Defendant, a public accommodation subject to Title III, deprives blind and visually-impaired individuals the benefits of its online goods, content, and services—all benefits it affords nondisabled individuals—thereby increasing the sense of isolation and stigma among these Americans that Title III was meant to redress.

13. Because Defendant’s Website is not and has never been fully accessible, and because upon information and belief Defendant does not have, and has never had, adequate corporate policies that are reasonably calculated to cause its Website to become and remain accessible, Plaintiff invokes [42 U.S.C. § 12188\(a\)\(2\)](#) and seeks a permanent injunction requiring Defendant to:

- a) Retain a qualified consultant acceptable to Plaintiff (“Web Accessibility Consultant”) who shall assist in improving the accessibility of its Website, including all third-party content and plug-ins, so the goods and services on the Website may be equally accessed and enjoyed by individuals with vision related disabilities;

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