

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

RICHARD MEJIA, Individually, and On Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,	:	Civil Action No.:
	:	
	:	
Plaintiff,	:	CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT FOR
	:	VIOLATIONS OF THE AMERICANS WITH
vs.	:	DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990 AND NEW
	:	YORK CITY HUMAN RIGHTS LAW
	:	
J & M FOODS, INC.,	:	
	:	
Defendant.	:	
	:	
	:	<u>DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL</u>

Plaintiff RICHARD MEJIA (“Plaintiff”) brings this class action both on an individual basis and, on behalf of all others similarly situated, for declaratory relief, injunctive relief and compensatory damages—including statutory and punitive damages—against defendant named herein, and alleges based upon the personal knowledge of Plaintiff, the investigation of counsel, and upon information and belief, as follows:

NATURE OF THE ACTION

1. Plaintiff is a visually-impaired and legally blind person¹ who brings this civil rights class action against defendant J & M Foods, Inc., (“Defendant”) for its failure to design, construct, maintain, and operate its website to be fully accessible to—and independently usable by—Plaintiff and other blind or visually-impaired people who use screen-reading software. Plaintiff asserts this action individually and on behalf of all other visually-impaired and/or legally blind individuals in the United States who have attempted to access Defendant’s website and have been denied access to the equal enjoyment of goods and/or services offered on the website during the past three years from the date of the filing of the complaint (the “Class” and “Class Period”).

2. In June 2022, Plaintiff browsed and attempted to transact business on Defendant’s website, www.janis-melanie.com (“website” or “Defendant’s website”). The main reason Plaintiff visited the website was to, *inter alia*, purchase products, goods, and/or services. The website sells/offers snacks and cookies. The website had the following accessibility issues:

(a) The reader spells out a lot of text on the page, such as product names, which occurs when the words are entirely in capital letters.

¹ Plaintiff uses the terms “blind” or “visually-impaired” to refer to all people with visual impairments who meet the legal definition of blindness; namely, a visual acuity with correction of less than or equal to 20 x 200. Some blind people who meet this definition have limited vision; others have no vision.

- (b) The website does not have a button to return to the main page.
- (c) The reader stops reading mid-sentence.
- (d) The buttons that increase and decrease the quantity of what the user wants

to buy are not labeled.

3. The accessibility issues Plaintiff experienced are still found on Defendant's website as of the date of the filing of this complaint. Plaintiff still intends to purchase certain goods and/or services from Defendant's website in the future, but currently cannot.

4. Defendant and its website violate Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ("ADA"), 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.*, and the New York City Human Rights Law ("NYCHRL"), N.Y.C. Administrative Code §§ 8-101 *et seq.*, as the website is not equally accessible to blind and visually-impaired consumers.

5. Plaintiff and the Class bring this action against Defendant seeking, *inter alia*, a preliminary and permanent injunction, other declaratory relief, statutory damages, actual and punitive damages, pre-judgment and post-judgment interest, and reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

6. This Court has subject-matter jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331.

7. This Court has supplemental jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1367 over Plaintiff's NYCHRL claims.

8. Defendant is subject to personal jurisdiction in this District. Defendant operates and distributes its products and/or services throughout the United States, including to consumers and others in this District. Plaintiff has been denied the full use and enjoyment of the goods and services offered on Defendant's website in this District. It was here that Defendant committed a

substantial part of the acts or omissions that caused injury to Plaintiff and the Class in violation of the ADA and the NYCHRL.

9. The access barriers that Plaintiff encountered have caused a denial of Plaintiff's full and equal access multiple times in the past, and now deter Plaintiff on a regular basis from accessing the Defendant's website in the future.

10. This Court is empowered to issue declaratory relief under 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202.

11. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b)(2), and (c) because: (i) Defendant's unlawful course of conduct occurred in large part in this District; and (ii) Plaintiff attempted to utilize the website in this District.

PARTIES

Plaintiff

12. Plaintiff is a resident of the Bronx, New York. Plaintiff is a blind, visually-impaired, handicapped person and a member of a protected class of individuals as defined under 42 U.S.C. § 12102(1)-(2) – and the regulations implementing the ADA set forth at 28 CFR §§ 36.101 *et seq.* – and as defined under the NYCHRL.

Defendant

13. Defendant is a corporation registered in Arizona. Defendant conducts business in New York through its website, which is a place of public accommodation as defined under 42 U.S.C. § 12181(7).

SUBSTANTIVE ALLEGATIONS

The visually-impaired use screen-readers to access the Internet.

14. In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control ("CDC") estimated that the blind population in the United States reached approximately 1.7 million. The American Foundation for

the Blind’s website states that the 2019 American Community Survey (conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau) identified an estimated 388,524 New Yorkers with vision difficulty.

15. The Internet has become a significant source of information, a portal, and a tool for conducting business, doing everyday activities such as shopping, learning, banking, researching, as well as many other activities for sighted, blind and visually-impaired persons alike. In today’s tech-savvy world, blind and visually-impaired people have the ability to access websites using keyboards in conjunction with screen access software that vocalizes the visual information found on a computer screen. This technology is known as screen-reading software.²

16. Blind and visually-impaired users of Microsoft Windows operating system-enabled computers and devices have several screen-reading software programs available to them. Some of these programs are available for purchase and other machines have built-in integrated software. NonVisual Desktop Access, otherwise known as “NVDA” is currently one of the most popular screen-reading software programs available for PCs.

17. Unless websites are designed to be read by screen-reading software, blind and visually-impaired persons are unable to fully access websites, and the information, products, goods and services contained thereon.

A company’s website must accommodate the use of screen readers

18. For screen-reading software to function, the information on a website must be capable of being rendered into text. If the website content is not capable of being rendered into

² As defined by the American Federation for the Blind, a refreshable Braille display used in conjunction with a computer can provide a blind person access to information on the computer screen by electronically raising and lowering different combinations of pins on internal cells. These raised pins correspond to, and adapt, as the user moves their cursor over the text on the computer screen.

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