

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

YORDALIZA TAVERAS, Individually, and
On Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,

Plaintiff,

vs.

SMART SNACKS LLC,

Defendant.

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Civil Action No.:

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT FOR
VIOLATIONS OF THE AMERICANS WITH
DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990 AND NEW
YORK CITY HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff Yordaliza Taveras (“Plaintiff”) brings this class action 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 Smart Snacks LLC (“Defendant”), and alleges based upon information and belief, personal knowledge of Plaintiff, and the investigation of counsel, 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 for its failure to design, construct, maintain, and operate its website, unboundsnacks.com (“Website”), to be fully accessible to—and independently usable by—Plaintiff and the Class 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 the Website and have been denied equal access to the enjoyment of walnuts offered thereon during the past three years from the date of the filing of the complaint (the “Class” and “Class Period”).

2. Defendant denies Plaintiff and the Class full and equal access to both the goods and features offered on the Website, which are accessible to non-disabled individuals. The Website’s features include, but are not limited to, the following: shipping policy, terms of service, contact information, blog, promotional offers, and more.

3. Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (the “ADA”) to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Its drafters intended that the statute

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 individuals who meet the definition of the term “legally blind” have limited vision, while others have no vision at all.

keep pace with the times and rapidly changing technology. The Internet has become an increasingly prominent part of everyday life, specifically providing blind and/or visually impaired individuals with the ability, via screen-readers, to access a variety of products and services fully and independently. The ADA applies to websites and is a powerful tool to stem the harmful and discriminatory effects of access barriers. Unfortunately, the Website that Plaintiff attempted to access currently has access barriers.

4. To clarify the ADA's application to websites, in March 2022, the United States Department of Justice issued guidance on accessibility. It stated, in relevant part, that:

Inaccessible web content means that people with disabilities are denied equal access to information. An inaccessible website can exclude people just as much as steps at an entrance to a physical location. A website with inaccessible features can limit the ability of people with disabilities to access public accommodation's goods, services, and privileges available through that website.²

5. Snubbing these guidelines, Defendant owns and/or operates the Website, which contains myriad access barriers that make it difficult, if not impossible, for Plaintiff and the Class users to even complete a transaction on the website. Preventing the ability of disabled persons to utilize the internet—a common marketplace and important tool for daily life—increases their feelings of isolation, stigma and discrimination of the type that Title III of the ADA sought to redress. Additionally, this sort of discrimination was, and remains, particularly acute due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Plaintiff has visited the Website numerous times, most recently on May 17, 2023. On each occasion, Plaintiff had the intent of purchasing the Cinnamon Walnuts. Unfortunately, Plaintiff and the Class are blocked from experiencing all of the Website's features, including the

² U.S. Dep't of Justice, Guidance on Web Accessibility and the ADA (Mar. 18, 2022), <https://www.ada.gov/resources/web-guidance>.

ability to complete a transaction thereon. Unless Defendant remediates their Website, Plaintiff and the Class will be unable to independently navigate, browse, and ultimately complete transactions thereon.

7. As a result of the continuing accessibility issues, Defendant, through its ownership and/or operation of the Website, violates Title III of the 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.*

8. 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

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

10. This Court has supplemental jurisdiction over the NYCHRL claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367.

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

12. 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 and continues to occur in this District; (ii) Defendant is subject to personal jurisdiction in this District; and (iii) Plaintiff attempted to use the Website in this District.

13. Defendant is subject to personal jurisdiction in this District. Defendant owns and/or operates the Website, which distributes its products throughout the United States, including to New York customers residing in this judicial district. It was within this judicial district that Plaintiff was being, and continues to be, denied the full use and enjoyment of the

walnuts offered on the Website. As such, it is here that Defendant is committing a substantial part of the acts or omissions that caused injury to Plaintiff and the Class in violation of the ADA and the NYCHRL.

PARTIES

Plaintiff

14. Plaintiff is a resident of New York, New York. Plaintiff is a blind, visually impaired, handicapped person and a member of a protected class of individuals pursuant to the ADA and NYCHRL.

Defendant

15. Defendant is a company registered in California. Defendant conducts business in New York through the Website, which is a place of public accommodation as defined under 42 U.S.C. § 12181(7).

SUBSTANTIVE ALLEGATIONS

The visually impaired are accessing the internet increasingly every year

16. 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.

17. For sighted and disabled persons alike, the internet has become a crucial resource. Stating the obvious, the internet houses websites that contain information on practically any topic imaginable. It is an invaluable tool for shopping, conducting business, entertainment, research, learning, and countless other activities.

18. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (“Pandemic”), MIT published a study projecting that the average American uses the internet for 23.6 hours a week. Due to the Pandemic,

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