

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

THOMAS J. OLSEN, Individually and on
behalf of all other persons similarly
situated,

Plaintiff,

v.

SOHO HOTEL OWNER LLC D/B/A 11
HOWARD HOTEL,

Defendant.

ECF CASE

No.: _____

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

INTRODUCTION

1. Plaintiff Thomas J. Olsen, who is legally blind, brings this civil rights action against Defendant Soho Hotel Owner LLC d/b/a/ 11 Howard Hotel (“11 Howard Hotel”) for its failure to design, construct, maintain, and operate its website, www.11howard.com (the “Website”), to be fully accessible to and independently usable by Plaintiff Olsen and other blind or visually-impaired people. 11 Howard Hotel denies full and equal access to its Website.

2. 11 Howard Hotel is denying the 10 million Americans¹ who are visually impaired access to its Website’s goods, content and services because the Website is largely incompatible with the screen reader program these Americans use to navigate an increasingly ecommerce world.

3. Plaintiff Olsen, individually and on behalf of others similarly situated, asserts claims under the Americans With Disabilities Act (“ADA”), New York State

¹ National Federation of Blind’s 2017 Fact Sheet. <https://nfb.org/fact-sheet-blindness-and-low-vision>

Human Rights Law (“NYSHRL”), and New York City Human Rights Law (“NYCHRL”) against the 11 Howard Hotel.

4. Plaintiff Olsen seeks a permanent injunction to cause 11 Howard Hotel to change its corporate policies, practices, and procedures so that its Website will become and remain accessible to blind and visually-impaired consumers.

THE PARTIES

5. Plaintiff Olsen, at all relevant times, is a resident of Brooklyn, New York, Kings County. As a blind, visually-impaired handicapped person, he is a member of a protected class of individuals under Title III of the ADA, under 42 U.S.C. § 12102(1)-(2), and the regulations implementing the ADA set forth at 28 CFR §§ 36.101 et seq., the NYSHRL and NYCHRL.

6. Soho Hotel Owner LLC is at all relevant times a Foreign Limited Liability Company organized under Delaware law, registered to do business in the State of New York, owns the 11Howard trademark, and has its headquarters at 390 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

7. This Court has subject-matter jurisdiction over this action under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 42 U.S.C. § 12181, as Plaintiff Olsen’s claims arise under Title III of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12181, *et seq.*, and 28 U.S.C. § 1332.

8. This Court has supplemental jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1367 over Plaintiff Olsen’s NYSHRL, N.Y. Exec. Law Article 15, and NYCHRL, N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-101 *et seq.*, claims.

9. Venue is proper in this District under 28 U.S.C. §1391(b)(1) and § 1391(d) because general jurisdiction exists over this foreign business entity and it would be considered to reside here if this District was a separate state: its corporate headquarters is in this District; and it has a continuous and systematic course of doing business in this District, as it operates multiple hotels in this District, rents property in this District, is registered to do business here, and it, upon information and belief, pays taxes in this District.

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

NATURE OF ACTION

11. Plaintiff Olsen is a visually impaired and legally blind person who requires screen-reading software to read website content using his computer. “Blind” or “visually-impaired” refers to people with visual impairments who meet the legal definition of blindness: they have a visual acuity with correction of less than or equal to 20 x 200.

12. Blind and visually-impaired people can access websites using keyboards in conjunction with screen access software that vocalizes the visual information found on a computer screen or displays the content on a refreshable Braille display. This technology is known as screen-reading software. Screen-reading software is currently the only method a blind or visually impaired person may independently access the Internet. 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, and services contained thereon.

13. Blind and visually impaired users of 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 programs are available without the user having to purchase the program separately. Job Access With Speech (“JAWS”) is currently the most popular, separately purchased and downloaded screen-reading software program available for a Windows computer.

14. 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 text, the blind or visually impaired user is unable to access the same content available to sighted users.

15. The international website standards organization, the World Wide Web Consortium, known throughout the world as W3C, has published version 2.0 of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (“WCAG 2.0”). WCAG 2.0 are well-established guidelines for making websites accessible to blind and visually impaired people. These guidelines are universally followed by most large business entities and government agencies to ensure its websites are accessible.

16. Non-compliant websites pose common access barriers to blind and visually-impaired persons:

- a. A text equivalent for every non-text element is not provided;
- b. Title frames with text are not provided for identification and navigation;
- c. Equivalent text is not provided when using scripts;

- d. Forms with the same information and functionality as for sighted persons are not provided;
- e. Information about the meaning and structure of content is not conveyed by more than the visual presentation of content;
- f. Text cannot be resized without assistive technology up to 200% without losing content or functionality;
- g. If the content enforces a time limit, the user is not able to extend, adjust or disable it;
- h. Web pages do not have titles that describe the topic or purpose;
- i. The purpose of each link cannot be determined from the link text alone or from the link text and its programmatically determined link context;
- j. One or more keyboard operable user interface lacks a mode of operation where the keyboard focus indicator is discernible;
- k. The default human language of each web page cannot be programmatically determined;
- l. When a component receives focus, it may initiate a change in context;
- m. Changing the setting of a user interface component may automatically cause a change of context where the user has not been advised before using the component;
- n. Labels or instructions are not provided when content requires user input, which include captcha prompts that require the user to verify that he or she is not a robot;

o. In content which is implemented by using markup languages, elements do not have complete start and end tags, elements are not nested according to its specifications, elements may contain duplicate attributes and/or any IDs are not unique;

p. Inaccessible Portable Document Format (PDFs); and,

q. The name and role of all User Interface elements cannot be programmatically determined; items that can be set by the user cannot be programmatically set; and/or notification of changes to these items is not available to user agents, including assistive technology.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

11 Howard Hotel, Its Website And Its Website's Barriers

17. 11 Howard Hotel is a 230 room hotel located in SoHo, New York. It offers its Website to the public, which offers features that should allow all consumers to access the facilities and services that it offers about the hotel.

18. 11 Howard Hotel's Website is heavily integrated with the hotel, serving as a gateway to it. Through the Website, 11 Howard Hotel's customers are, *inter alia*, able to: find information about the hotel's location; book a room; learn about the hotel's conscious hospitality philosophy; learn about the various room options and room rates; learn about the dining and entertainment options inside and nearby the hotel, including Le Coucou and The Library; and learn about offers (e.g., special Valentine's Day offers).

19. It is, upon information and belief, 11 Howard Hotel's policy and practice to deny Plaintiff Olsen and other blind or visually-impaired users access to its Website, thereby denying the facilities and services that are offered and integrated with its hotel. Due to its failure and refusal to remove access barriers to its Website, Plaintiff Olsen and

visually-impaired persons have been and are still being denied equal access to 11 Howard Hotel's hotel and the numerous facilities, goods, services, and benefits offered to the public through its Website.

20. Plaintiff Olsen cannot use a computer without the assistance of screen-reading software. He is, however, a proficient screen-reader user and uses it to access the Internet. He has visited the Website on separate occasions using screen-reading software.

21. During his visits to the Website, the last occurring on or about January 30, 2018, Plaintiff Olsen encountered multiple access barriers that denied him full and equal access to the facilities and services offered to the public and made available to the public; and that denied him the full enjoyment of the facilities, goods, and services of the Website, as well as to the facilities, goods, and services of the hotel. Because of these barriers he was unable to: find information about the hotel's location; book a room; learn about the various room options and room rates; learn about the dining and entertainment options inside and nearby the hotel; and learn about offers.

22. While attempting to navigate the Website, Plaintiff Olsen encountered multiple accessibility barriers for blind or visually-impaired people:

a. Lack of Alternative Text ("alt-text"), or a text equivalent. Alt-text is an invisible code embedded beneath a graphical image on a website. Web accessibility requires that alt-text be coded with each picture so that screen-reading software can speak the alt-text where a sighted user sees pictures, which includes captcha prompts. Alt-text does not change the visual presentation, but instead a text box shows when the mouse moves over the picture. The lack of alt-text on these graphics prevents screen readers from accurately vocalizing a description of the graphics. As a result, 11 Howard Hotel's

visually-impaired customers are unable to determine what is on the Website, find information about the hotel's location; learn about the various room options; learn about what restaurants and bars are located in the hotel; make a reservation; learn about pricing and any specials or packages; and learn about hotel policies.

b. Empty Links That Contain No Text causing the function or purpose of the link to not be presented to the user. This can introduce confusion for keyboard and screen-reader users;

c. Redundant Links where adjacent links go to the same URL address which results in additional navigation and repetition for keyboard and screen-reader users; and/or

d. Linked Images Missing Alt-text, which causes problems if an image within a link contains no text and that image does not provide alt-text. A screen reader then has no content to present the user as to the function of the link, including information contained in PDFs.

11 Howard Hotel Must Remove Barriers to Its Website

23. Due to the inaccessibility of its Website, blind and visually-impaired customers such as Plaintiff Olsen, who need screen-readers, cannot fully and equally use or enjoy the facilities, goods, and services 11 Howard Hotel offers to the public on its Website. The Website's access barriers that Plaintiff Olsen encountered have caused a denial of his full and equal access in the past, and now deter him on a regular basis from accessing the Website. These access barriers have likewise deterred him from visiting the 11 Howard Hotel and enjoying them equal to sighted individuals.

24. If the Website was equally accessible to all, Plaintiff Olsen could independently navigate it, view goods and service items, find information about the hotel's location; book a room; learn about the hotel's conscious hospitality philosophy; learn about the various room options and room rates; learn about the dining and entertainment options inside and nearby the hotel; and learn about offers.

25. Through his attempts to use the Website, Plaintiff Olsen has actual knowledge of the access barriers that make these services inaccessible and independently unusable by blind and visually-impaired people.

26. Because simple compliance with the WCAG 2.0 Guidelines would provide Plaintiff Olsen and other visually-impaired consumers with equal access to the Website, Plaintiff Olsen alleges that the 11 Howard Hotel has engaged in acts of intentional discrimination, including, but not limited to, the following policies or practices:

- a. Constructing and maintaining a website that is inaccessible to visually-impaired individuals, including Plaintiff Olsen;
- b. Failing to construct and maintain a website that is sufficiently intuitive to be equally accessible to visually-impaired individuals, including Plaintiff Olsen; and,
- c. Failing to take actions to correct these access barriers in the face of substantial harm and discrimination to blind and visually impaired consumers, such as Plaintiff Olsen, as a member of a protected class.

27. 11 Howard Hotel therefore uses standards, criteria or methods of administration that have the effect of discriminating or perpetuating the discrimination of others, as alleged herein.

28. Title III of the ADA expressly contemplates the injunctive relief that Plaintiff Olsen seeks under 42 U.S.C. § 12188(a)(2).

29. Because its Website has never been equally accessible, and because 11 Howard Hotel lacks a corporate policy that is reasonably calculated to cause its Website to become and remain accessible, Plaintiff Olsen seeks a permanent injunction under 42 U.S.C. § 12188(a)(2) requiring 11 Howard Hotel to retain a qualified consultant acceptable to Plaintiff Olsen to assist 11 Howard Hotel to comply with WCAG 2.0 guidelines for its Website:

- a. Remediating the Website to be WCAG 2.0 AA compliant;
- b. Training 11 Howard Hotel employees and agents who develop the Website on accessibility compliance under the WCAG 2.0 guidelines;
- c. Regularly checking the accessibility of the Website under the WCAG 2.0 guidelines;
- d. Regularly testing user accessibility by blind or vision-impaired persons to ensure that the 11 Howard Hotel's Website complies under the WCAG 2.0 guidelines; and,
- e. Developing an accessibility policy that is clearly disclosed on 11 Howard Hotel's Website, with contact information for users to report accessibility-related problems.

30. Although the 11 Howard Hotel may currently have centralized policies on maintaining and operating its Website, 11 Howard Hotel lacks a plan and policy reasonably calculated to make them fully and equally accessible to, and independently usable by, blind and other visually impaired consumers.

31. Without injunctive relief, Plaintiff Olsen and other visually impaired consumers will continue to be unable to independently use the Website, violating its rights.

32. 11 Howard Hotel has, upon information and belief, invested substantial sums in developing and maintaining its Website and has generated significant revenue from the Website. These amounts are far greater than the associated cost of making its Website equally accessible to visually impaired customers.

33. 11 Howard Hotel has failed to take any prompt and equitable steps to remedy its discriminatory conduct. These violations are ongoing.

CLASS ACTION ALLEGATIONS

34. Plaintiff Olsen seeks to certify a nationwide class under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(2): all legally blind individuals in the United States who have attempted to access 11 Howard Hotel's Website and as a result have been denied access to the equal enjoyment of goods and services offered at the hotel, during the relevant statutory period ("Class Members").

35. Plaintiff Olsen seeks to certify a State of New York subclass under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(2): all legally blind individuals in the State of New York who have attempted to access the Website and as a result have been denied access to the equal

enjoyment of goods and services offered at the hotel, during the relevant statutory period (“New York Subclass Members”).

36. Plaintiff Olsen seeks to certify a New York City subclass under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(2): all legally blind individuals in the City of New York who have attempted to access the Website and as a result have been denied access to the equal enjoyment of goods and services offered at the hotel, during the relevant statutory period (“New York City Subclass Members”).

37. Common questions of law and fact exist amongst the Class Members, New York Subclass Members and New York City Subclass Members:

- a. Whether 11 Howard Hotel is a place of “public accommodation”;
- b. Whether 11 Howard Hotel’s Website is a “public accommodation” or a service or good “of a place of public accommodation” under Title III of the ADA;
- c. Whether 11 Howard Hotel’s Website is a “place or provider of public accommodation” or an “accommodation, advantage, facility or privilege” under the NYSHRL or NYCHRL;
- d. Whether 11 Howard Hotel’s Website denies the full and equal enjoyment of its goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to people with visual disabilities, violating Title III of the ADA; and
- e. Whether 11 Howard Hotel’s Website denies the full and equal enjoyment of its goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to people with visual disabilities, violating the NYSHRL or NYCHRL.

38. Plaintiff Olsen’s claims are typical of the Class Members, New York Subclass Members and New York City Subclass Members: they are all severely visually

impaired or otherwise blind, and claim the 11 Howard Hotel has violated Title III of the ADA, NYSHRL or NYCHRL by failing to update or remove access barriers on its Website so it can be independently accessible to the visually impaired individuals.

39. Plaintiff Olsen will fairly and adequately represent and protect the Class and Subclasses' interests because he has retained and is represented by counsel competent and experienced in complex class action litigation, and because he has no interests antagonistic to the Class or Subclasses. Class certification of the claims is appropriate under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(2) because the 11 Howard Hotel has acted or refused to act on grounds generally applicable to the Class and Subclasses, making appropriate both declaratory and injunctive relief with respect to Plaintiff, the Class and Subclasses.

40. Alternatively, class certification is appropriate under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(3) because fact and legal questions common to Class and Subclass Members predominate over questions affecting only individuals, and because a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of this litigation.

41. Judicial economy will be served by maintaining this lawsuit as a class action in that it is likely to avoid the burden that would be otherwise placed upon the judicial system by the filing of numerous similar suits by people with visual disabilities throughout the United States.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION
VIOLATIONS OF THE ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12181 *et seq.*

42. Plaintiff Olsen, individually and on behalf of the Class Members, repeats and realleges every allegation of the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

43. Title III of the ADA prohibits “discriminat[ion] on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation.” 42 U.S.C. § 12182(a).

44. The 11 Howard Hotel is a public accommodation within the definition of Title III of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12181(7)(a). Its Website is a service, privilege, or advantage of the 11 Howard Hotel. The Website is a service that is integrated with these locations.

45. Under Title III of the ADA, it is unlawful discrimination to deny individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate in or benefit from the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of an entity. 42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(A)(i).

46. Under Title III of the ADA, it is unlawful discrimination to deny individuals with disabilities an opportunity to participate in or benefit from the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodation, which is equal to the opportunities afforded to other individuals. 42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(A)(ii).

47. Under Title III of the ADA, unlawful discrimination also includes, among other things:

[A] failure to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such modifications are necessary to afford such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless the entity can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages or accommodations; and a failure to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, unless the entity can demonstrate that taking

such steps would fundamentally alter the nature of the good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation being offered or would result in an undue burden.

42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(2)(A)(ii)-(iii).

48. These acts violate Title III of the ADA, and the regulations promulgated thereunder. Plaintiff Olsen, who is a member of a protected class of persons under Title III of the ADA, has a physical disability that substantially limits the major life activity of sight within the meaning of 42 U.S.C. §§ 12102(1)(A)-(2)(A). He, furthermore, has been denied full and equal access to the Website, has not been provided services that are provided to other patrons who are not disabled, and has been provided services that are inferior to the services provided to non-disabled persons.

49. Under 42 U.S.C. § 12188 and the remedies, procedures, and rights set forth and incorporated therein, Plaintiff Olsen requests the relief as set forth below.

SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION
VIOLATIONS OF THE NYSHRL

50. Plaintiff Olsen, individually and on behalf of the New York Subclass Members, repeats and realleges every allegation of the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

51. N.Y. Exec. Law § 296(2)(a) provides that it is “an unlawful discriminatory practice for any person, being the owner, lessee, proprietor, manager, superintendent, agent or employee of any place of public accommodation . . . because of the . . . disability of any person, directly or indirectly, to refuse, withhold from or deny to such person any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities or privileges thereof.”

52. 11 Howard Hotel constitutes a sales establishment and a public accommodation within the definition of N.Y. Exec. Law § 292(9). 11 Howard Hotel’s

Website is a service, privilege or advantage of the hotel. 11 Howard Hotel's Website is a service that is by and integrated with its hotel.

53. 11 Howard Hotel is subject to NYSHRL because it owns, controls and operates its hotel and the Website. 11 Howard Hotel is a "person" within the meaning of N.Y. Exec. Law § 292(1).

54. 11 Howard Hotel is violating N.Y. Exec. Law § 296(2)(a) in refusing to update or remove access barriers to its Website, causing its Website and the services integrated with its hotel to be completely inaccessible to the blind. This inaccessibility denies blind patrons full and equal access to the facilities, goods and services that the 11 Howard Hotel makes available to the non-disabled public.

55. Under N.Y. Exec. Law § 296(2)(c)(i), unlawful discriminatory practice includes, among other things, "a refusal to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such modifications are necessary to afford facilities, privileges, advantages or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless such person can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such facilities, privileges, advantages or accommodations being offered or would result in an undue burden."

56. Under N.Y. Exec. Law § 296(2)(c)(ii), unlawful discriminatory practice also includes, "a refusal to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded or denied services because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, unless such person can demonstrate that taking such steps would fundamentally alter the nature of the facility, privilege, advantage or accommodation being offered or would result in an undue burden."

57. Readily available, well-established guidelines exist on the Internet for making websites accessible to the blind and visually impaired. These guidelines have been followed by other large business entities and government agencies in making their websites accessible, including but not limited to: adding alt-text to graphics and ensuring that all functions can be performed using a keyboard. Incorporating the basic components to make its Website accessible would neither fundamentally alter the nature of its business nor result in an undue burden to them.

58. 11 Howard Hotel's actions constitute willful intentional discrimination against the class because of a disability, violating the NYSHRL, N.Y. Exec. Law § 296(2), in that 11 Howard Hotel has:

- a. Constructed and maintained a website that is inaccessible to Class Members with knowledge of the discrimination; and/or
- b. Constructed and maintained a website that is sufficiently intuitive and/or obvious that is inaccessible to blind class members; and/or
- c. Failed to take actions to correct these access barriers in the face of substantial harm and discrimination to blind class members.

59. 11 Howard Hotel discriminates, and will continue in the future to discriminate against Plaintiff Olsen and New York Subclass Members on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, accommodations and/or opportunities of 11 Howard Hotel's Website and its hotel under § 296(2) *et seq.* and/or its implementing regulations. Unless the Court enjoins 11 Howard Hotel from continuing to engage in these unlawful practices, Plaintiff and the New York Subclass Members will continue to suffer irreparable harm.

60. As 11 Howard Hotel's actions violate the NYSHRL, Plaintiff Olsen seeks injunctive relief to remedy the discrimination.

61. Plaintiff Olsen is also entitled to compensatory damages, as well as civil penalties and fines under N.Y. Exec. Law § 297(4)(c) *et seq.* for every offense.

62. Plaintiff Olsen is also entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs.

63. Under N.Y. Exec. Law § 297 and the remedies, procedures, and rights set forth and incorporated therein Plaintiff prays for judgment as set forth below.

THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION
VIOLATIONS OF THE NYCHRL

64. Plaintiff Olsen, individually and on behalf the New York City Subclass Members, repeats and realleges every allegation of the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

65. The NYCHRL provides that "It shall be an unlawful discriminatory practice for any person, being the owner, lessee, proprietor, manager, superintendent, agent or employee of any place or provider of public accommodation, because of . . . disability . . . directly or indirectly, to refuse, withhold from or deny to such person, any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities or privileges thereof." N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107(4)(a).

66. 11 Howard Hotel is a sales establishment and a public accommodation within the meaning of the NYCHRL, N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-102(9), and its Website is a service that is integrated with its establishments.

67. 11 Howard Hotel is subject to NYCHRL because it owns, controls and operates its hotel in the City of New York and its Website, making it a person within the meaning of N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-102(1).

68. 11 Howard Hotel is violating the NYCHRL in refusing to update or remove access barriers to Website, causing its Website and the services integrated with its hotel to be completely inaccessible to the blind. This inaccessibility denies blind patrons full and equal access to the facilities, goods, and services that 11 Howard Hotel makes available to the non-disabled public.

69. 11 Howard Hotel is required to “make reasonable accommodation to the needs of persons with disabilities . . . any person prohibited by the provisions of [§ 8-107 *et seq.*] from discriminating on the basis of disability shall make reasonable accommodation to enable a person with a disability to . . . enjoy the right or rights in question provided that the disability is known or should have been known by the covered entity.” N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107(15)(a).

70. 11 Howard Hotel’s actions constitute willful intentional discrimination against the Subclass because of a disability, violating the NYCHRL, N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107(4)(a) and § 8-107(15)(a,) in that it has:

- a. Constructed and maintained a website that is inaccessible to blind class members with knowledge of the discrimination; and/or
- b. Constructed and maintained a website that is sufficiently intuitive and/or obvious that is inaccessible to blind class members; and/or
- c. Failed to take actions to correct these access barriers in the face of substantial harm and discrimination to blind class members.

71. As such, 11 Howard Hotel discriminates, and will continue in the future to discriminate against Plaintiff Olsen and the New York City Subclass Members because of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges,

advantages, accommodations and/or opportunities of its Website and its establishments under § 8-107(4)(a) and/or its implementing regulations. Unless the Court enjoins 11 Howard Hotel from continuing to engage in these unlawful practices, Plaintiff and the New York City Subclass will continue to suffer irreparable harm.

72. As 11 Howard Hotel's actions violate the NYCHRL, Plaintiff Olsen seeks injunctive relief to remedy the discrimination.

73. Plaintiff Olsen is also entitled to compensatory damages, as well as civil penalties and fines for each offense. N.Y.C. Admin. Code §§ 8-120(8), 8-126(a).

74. Plaintiff Olsen is also entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs.

75. Under N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-120 and § 8-126 and the remedies, procedures, and rights set forth and incorporated therein Plaintiff prays for judgment as set forth below.

FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION
DECLARATORY RELIEF

76. Plaintiff Olsen, individually and on behalf the Class Members, repeats and realleges every allegation of the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

77. An actual controversy has arisen and now exists between the parties in that Plaintiff Olsen contends, and is informed and believes that 11 Howard Hotel denies, that its Website contains access barriers denying blind customers the full and equal access to the goods, services and facilities of its Website and by extension its hotel, which 11 Howard Hotel owns, operates and/or controls, fails to comply with applicable laws including, but not limited to, Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12182, *et seq.*, N.Y. Exec. Law § 296, *et seq.*, and N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107, *et seq.* prohibiting discrimination against the blind.

78. A judicial declaration is necessary and appropriate now in order that each of the parties may know its respective rights and duties and act accordingly.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Olsen respectfully requests this Court grant the following relief:

a. A preliminary and permanent injunction to prohibit 11 Howard Hotel from violating Title III of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12182, *et seq.*, N.Y. Exec. Law § 296, *et seq.*, N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107, *et seq.*, and the laws of New York;

b. A preliminary and permanent injunction requiring 11 Howard Hotel to take all the steps necessary to make its Website into full compliance with the requirements set forth in Title III of the ADA, and its implementing regulations, so that the Website is readily accessible to and usable by blind individuals;

c. A declaration that 11 Howard Hotel owns, maintains and operates the Website in a manner that discriminates against the blind and which fails to provide access for persons with disabilities as required by ADA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12182, *et seq.*, N.Y. Exec. Law § 296, *et seq.*, N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107, *et seq.*, and the laws of New York

d. An order certifying the Class and Subclasses under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) & (b)(2) and/or (b)(3), appointing Plaintiff as Class Representative, and his attorneys as Class Counsel;

e. Compensatory damages in an amount to be determined by proof, including all applicable statutory damages, punitive damages and fines;

f. Pre- and post-judgment interest;

g. An award of costs and expenses of this action together with reasonable attorneys' and expert fees; and

h. Such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 38(b), Plaintiff Olsen demands a trial by jury on all questions of fact the Complaint raises.

Dated: New York, New York
February 4, 2018

LIPSKY LOWE LLP

s/ Douglas B. Lipsky _____
Douglas B. Lipsky
Christopher Lowe
630 Third Avenue, Fifth Floor
New York, New York 10017-6705
Tel: 212.392.4772
Fax: 212.444.1030
doug@lipskylowe.com
chris@lipskylowe.com