



**WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS**

For Immediate Release

**ALLEGATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION LODGED AGAINST TWO POPULAR
CAR-SHARING COMPANIES -- FLEXCAR AND ZIPCAR**

WASHINGTON, D.C., October 10, 2007-- The filing of lawsuits against two of the most widely-recognized car-sharing companies in the country—Flexcar and Zipcar, was announced today by the Equal Rights Center, a non-profit civil rights organization, represented by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and law firm Steptoe & Johnson.

According to the complaints, Flexcar and Zipcar violated both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the D.C. Human Rights Act because they did not provide people with disabilities full and equal enjoyment of their car-sharing services.

Plaintiff Rosemary Ciotti of Virginia became a member of Flexcar in May 2007 and was led to believe, through the membership agreement and company website, that hand controls were available in Flexcar vehicles. Hand controls are devices that enable people to drive independently despite being unable to operate accelerator and brake pedals. They are relatively inexpensive and easily installed mechanical devices. The installation of hand controls does not prevent other drivers from using the gas and brake pedals to operate the vehicle.

When Ms. Ciotti, who needs hand controls in order to be able to operate a vehicle, contacted Flexcar to acquire hand controls for the car she was reserving, Flexcar's regional manager informed her that even though the Flexcar website stated that it would provide hand controls, Flexcar did not and would not provide them. He further informed Ms. Ciotti that Flexcar was in the process of rewriting the section of the website that states that hand controls would be available to assist disabled persons in operating its vehicles. The section of the Flexcar website that stated that hand controls would be available to assist disabled persons in operating its vehicles has since been deleted.

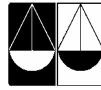
"Having rented cars with hand controls from national car rental companies many times before, I was shocked when Flexcar refused to provide any cars with hand controls, in spite of a statement to the contrary on their website," said Ms. Ciotti.

In May 2007, Ms. Ciotti similarly contacted Zipcar via email regarding the availability of hand controls in its vehicles. She was informed that Zipcar did not provide hand controls for its vehicles, which prevented her from becoming a member.

Under the ADA, places of public accommodation have an obligation to remove architectural barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing their facilities. According to the law, rental cars constitute facilities from which barriers must be removed, and the ADA regulation lists "installing vehicle hand controls" as an example of readily achievable barrier removal.

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The complaints further allege that both Flexcar and Zipcar restrict the ability to transport animals, including assistance animals, in vehicles, and do not permit their members to be driven by an aide, despite that member's willingness to be the financially responsible party, additional violations of the ADA. Furthermore, the complaints both name the District of Columbia as a defendant. By providing these companies with free parking spaces, the District gives benefits to entities that discriminate against people with disabilities.

Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, the executive director of the ERC stated, "It is neither expensive nor time consuming to add or remove hand controls to vehicles. Flexcar and Zipcar simply don't wish to permit a substantial portion of the population access to the services these two companies provide. I can make no sense of such decisions. They are illegal and narrow the customer base as well."

Individuals join a car sharing service by completing a membership application and choosing a usage plan. Members choose from a variety of vehicles parked in hundreds of locations in the area, serving almost sixty Metro stations. After making a reservation, they simply retrieve the reserved vehicle from its designated free parking space and return the vehicle to that space. The car sharing company covers the cost of gasoline, maintenance, and car insurance.

Flexcar is a privately owned corporation headquartered in Seattle, WA. It presently operates in twelve regions across the country including Washington D.C. and has over three hundred vehicles available for its car sharing services in the Washington D.C.-area.

Zipcar is a privately owned corporation headquartered in Cambridge, MA. It presently operates in eight regions across the country including Washington D.C. and has over 470 vehicles available for its car sharing services in the Washington D.C.-area.

Originally established in 1983 as the Fair Housing Council of Greater Washington, the Equal Rights Center is a private, not-for-profit, civil rights agency that is now a product of mergers with both the Fair Employment Council in 1999 and the Disability Rights Council of Greater Washington on June 30, 2005. It is dedicated to identifying, challenging, and eliminating discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and government services through education, research, testing, counseling, enforcement, and advocacy. To obtain more information about the Equal Rights Center, please go to www.equalrightscenter.org or call the Equal Rights Center at 202.234.3062.

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs was established in 1968 to provide pro bono legal services to address issues of discrimination and entrenched poverty. Since its founding, the Committee has handled more than 5,000 cases on behalf of individuals and advocacy organizations in the areas of equal employment, fair housing, public accommodations, public education, asylum and refugee rights, and disability rights. For more information about the Committee, see www.washlaw.org. The Committee can be reached at 202.319.1000.

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Steptoe & Johnson LLP has over 60 years of practice and more than 450 attorneys in offices in Washington, New York, Chicago, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Century City, London, and Brussels, providing counsel and representation in a wide range of legal fields. The firm also has a long and rich tradition of public service, handling a full spectrum of pro bono matters. Steptoe attorneys recorded over 36,000 pro bono hours in 2006, and was ranked as one of the Top 20 Pro Bono Law Firms by the American Lawyer.

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