



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS

For Immediate Release

Allegations of Discrimination Lodged Against Local Restaurant

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 12, 2008 – The Equal Rights Center (ERC), a non-profit civil rights organization, filed a lawsuit yesterday against Circa at Dupont, alleging the restaurant located near Dupont Circle is discriminating against people with disabilities.

According to the complaint, Circa has violated both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the D.C. Human Rights Act by failing to provide people with disabilities equal access to its restaurant.

Inaccessibility at Circa was brought to the ERC's attention by Marc Fiedler, who is also named as a plaintiff in the case. After reading a newspaper item about the opening of the restaurant, Mr. Fiedler attempted to dine at Circa in July 2007. However, Mr. Fiedler, who uses a wheelchair, was unable to enter the restaurant due to a step at the entrance.

Mr. Fiedler then attempted numerous times via email and in person to notify the MHG Group of Companies, owner of Circa, of the restaurant's inaccessible entrance. Although he was told that the restaurant planned to create an accessible entrance, Mr. Fiedler saw no changes to the restaurant's entrance when he returned on many occasions over a period of six months.

Under both the ADA and the D.C. Human Rights Act, restaurants, as places of public accommodation, are obligated to remove architectural barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing their facilities.

"When you consider that the restaurant that occupied the same space before Circa had a street-level entrance for its customers with disabilities to use, it should be a simple matter for Circa to also abide by the law," stated Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, the Executive Director of the Equal Rights Center. "We cannot understand why a restaurant would not want to open its doors to even more customers and do what is right, especially when it is so easy."

In addition to having an inaccessible entrance for people with disabilities, Circa also has numerous other barriers that prevent the disability community from accessing goods and services. These barriers include:

- a lack of accessible tables that people who use wheelchairs could access or utilize;
- a service and ordering counter that is too high for people in wheelchairs to reach; and
- an outdoor eating area that is inaccessible to people in wheelchairs due to a step at its entrance from the restaurant and a narrow gate that prevents access at its entrance from Q Street.

The ERC and Mr. Fiedler are represented in the lawsuit by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs.

The Equal Rights Center began in 1999 and consists of three former Greater Washington agencies: The Fair Housing Council, the Fair Employment Council, and the Disability Rights

- more -



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

Council. The ERC is a unique private, not-for-profit, civil rights organization that is dedicated to identifying, challenging, and eliminating discrimination against members in all protected groups, in regard to housing, employment, public accommodations, and government services. The ERC's work includes 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 and 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.

For more information contact:

Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, 202.234.3062 ext. 1101
Executive Director, Equal Rights Center
bkahn@equalrightscenter.org

E. Elaine Gardner, 202.319.1000 ext. 131
Disability Rights Project Director
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
Elaine_Gardner@washlaw.org

###