



Colorado
Cross-Disability
Coalition

For Immediate Release

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Equal Rights Center and Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition File Suits Against Abercrombie & Fitch Co. for Discriminating Against People with Disabilities

WASHINGTON, D.C., November 24, 2009 –Today the Equal Rights Center (ERC), a national civil rights non-profit, and the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition (CCDC), a statewide disability rights advocacy organization, filed federal lawsuits in Colorado and Maryland against Abercrombie & Fitch Co.—including Hollister and Abercrombie & Fitch stores—alleging that the stores using these brands fail to provide adequate access to goods and facilities to people with disabilities.

The Hollister brand of Abercrombie & Fitch Co. was launched in 2000, nearly a decade after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Hollister stores rely on a signature style of construction, which usually includes steps to a porch-like entrance. These entrances with steps are inaccessible to individuals with disabilities. Customers who use wheelchairs or scooters for mobility are forced to use a segregated door located away from the main entrance. Signage directing customers with disabilities to this door is often hidden or does not exist, and in some cases this door is kept locked. Abercrombie & Fitch Co. has refused to remove the steps, despite requests from organizations representing people with disabilities.

“It is shocking and frustrating that nearly 20 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, international corporations still discriminate against people with disabilities,” said Kevin Williams, CCDC’s Legal Program Director and the attorney bringing one of the cases. “The Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition members and millions of others across the country should not be forced to encounter discrimination this holiday season—or any other time of the year—when attempting to participate in the same activities as people without disabilities.”

According to the complaints filed today in U.S. District Courts in both Colorado and Maryland, Abercrombie & Fitch Co., the international chain of clothing stores with 1,127 stores located in 49 states, the District of Columbia, Canada and the U.K., has many locations that violate the ADA, a federal law that requires places of public accommodation to be accessible to people with disabilities.

The ERC and the CCDC also allege that, despite the average square footage of 6,746 in a Hollister store and 8,888 in an Abercrombie & Fitch store, the interiors of both are largely inaccessible. The ERC has conducted investigations of Hollister and Abercrombie & Fitch stores in nine states and the District of Columbia. Investigations conducted by the ERC and the CCDC found:

- steps into the stores, and side entrance doors that are locked;
- service counters that are too high for customers who use wheelchairs to reach or use;
- merchandise displays and other internal décor that block access throughout the stores for individuals who use wheelchairs; and
- fixed shelving merchandise displays that are inaccessible.

“Abercrombie & Fitch Co. designed its Hollister and Abercrombie & Fitch brand stores with full knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act, yet still chose to construct stores with physical barriers that prohibit people with disabilities from fully enjoying their services,” said Don Kahl, Executive Director of the ERC. “In this economy and with the holiday season approaching, Abercrombie & Fitch Co. should consider not only the moral ramifications of its conduct, but also the business effect of being inaccessible to the millions of buyers in America with disabilities.”

The ERC is represented by the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs and the law firm of Vinson & Elkins, LLP.

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About the Equal Rights Center (www.equalrightscenter.org)

Since 1983, the Equal Rights Center (ERC), a national non-profit civil rights organization, has worked to identify, challenge, and eliminate discrimination. The ERC combats discrimination in housing, employment, access to public accommodations and government services, disability rights and immigrant rights, through education and outreach, research, testing, counseling, advocacy and enforcement.

About the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition (www.ccdconline.org)

The Colorado Cross Disability Coalition (CCDC) is a statewide organization run by and for people with all types of disabilities to promote social justice and create systems change for people with all types of disabilities. The CCDC accomplishes its mission by changing systems through organizing, advocacy, education, and systemic change.