



For Immediate Release

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Equal Rights Center and Eye Care Centers of America Announce National Accessibility Initiative

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 3, 2011—The [Equal Rights Center](#) (ERC), a national non-profit civil rights organization, and Eye Care Centers of America, Inc., one of the nation's largest optometric retailers, announced today their agreement and initiative to help ensure that all its stores across the country will be more accessible to people with disabilities.

“The availability of accessible health services is a key aspect in the lives of the more than 60 million people with disabilities in our country,” said Don Kahl, Executive Director of the ERC. “Through this far-reaching agreement, Eye Care Centers of America is becoming a national leader in acknowledging the importance of accessible stores and optometric services for people with disabilities.”

Eye Care Centers of America owns and operates more than 500 eye care centers throughout the United States under several brands, including "EyeMasters," "Visionworks," "Vision World," "Doctor's VisionWorks," "Dr. Bizer's VisionWorld," "Dr. Bizer's ValuVision," "Doctor's ValuVision," "Hour Eyes," "Stein Optical," "Eye DRx" and "Binyon's." More than 20 locations in the Washington Metropolitan Area will be impacted by this initiative. This nationwide agreement not only includes removing physical barriers to accessibility and installing more accessible eye-exam equipment and testing rooms, but also provides for training in how to serve people with disabilities for Eye Care Centers of America staff.

When ERC member Georges Aguehoude raised concerns about the accessibility of Hour Eyes stores located in the District of Columbia, the ERC surveyed several locations and identified accessibility issues that acted as barriers for individuals with disabilities to entering Hour Eyes stores and eye examination rooms, and to using some eye exam equipment. The ERC then approached Eye Care Centers of America, who agreed to work with the ERC to make all its stores nationwide more accessible to customers with disabilities.

“Being unable to access medical services is frustrating and embarrassing to people with disabilities and also concerning for health reasons. It is encouraging to see Eye Care Centers of America agree to make their services more accessible for all individuals—including those with disabilities,” said Aguehoude.

“Although it can be disheartening to uncover barriers to accessibility, we have found that many business leaders recognize the importance of ensuring their stores and products are accessible to all. The agreement with Eye Care Centers of America is another important victory for people with disabilities as well as all those who value an accessible society,” said Elaine Gardner, Disability Rights Project Director at the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs.

In reaching this agreement, the ERC was represented by the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs and the Washington law firm of Crowell & Moring, LLP. Eye Care Centers of America has also agreed to compensate the ERC and Mr. Aguehoude for their damages and attorneys’ fees incurred in this matter.

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

Originally formed in 1983, the Equal Rights Center (ERC) is a national non-profit civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C. With members located in 33 states and the District of Columbia, the ERC works nationally to promote equal opportunity in housing, employment, disability rights, immigrant rights, and access to public accommodations and government services for all protected classes under federal, state, and local laws.

About the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (<http://www.washlaw.org/>)

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.

About Crowell & Moring LLP (www.crowell.com)

Crowell & Moring LLP is an international law firm with more than 500 lawyers representing clients in litigation and arbitration, regulatory, and transactional matters. The firm is internationally recognized for its representation of Fortune 500 companies in high-stakes litigation, as well as its ongoing commitment to pro bono service and diversity. The firm has offices in Washington, DC, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Orange County, Anchorage, London, and Brussels.