# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLORADO

Civil Action No. 1:20-cv-1837

LAKINYA BESS, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

v.

FRONTIER AIRLINES, INC.,

Defendant.

### CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT AND JURY DEMAND

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- 1. The COVID-19 pandemic has already killed over 100,000 Americans, left record numbers unemployed, and triggered a global economic downturn.
- 2. At a time when many are struggling to get by and cash is at a premium,

  Defendant Frontier Airlines has forced its customers to extend them interest-free

  loans—even after the company received a bailout from the federal government through
  the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
- 3. Due to decreased demand for air travel, Frontier has cancelled the vast majority of its scheduled flights. But rather than returning its customers' money—as required by its Contract of Carriage and Department of Transportation rules—Frontier

is keeping that money and instead offering its customers vouchers for future travel.

4. Plaintiff Lakinya Bess is one of the many consumers affected by Frontier's refusal to issue refunds. On behalf of herself and thousands like her, she seeks an order requiring Frontier to comply with its contractual obligations and an award of damages sufficient to compensate customers who have lost the use of their money during a public health and economic crisis.

#### **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

- 5. The Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action under 28 U.S.C. § 1332(d)(2) because this is a class action in which the amount in controversy exceeds \$5,000,000, exclusive of interest and costs, there are more than 100 members in the proposed class, and at least one class member is a citizen of a state different from Defendant.
- 6. Venue is proper in this Court under 28 U.S.C. §1391(b) because Frontier maintains its principal place of business in this district.

#### **PARTIES**

- 7. Plaintiff Lakinya Bess is a citizen and resident of Fairfield, California.
- 8. Defendant Frontier Airlines, Inc., is a corporation registered under the laws of Colorado and headquartered in Denver, Colorado.

#### **FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS**

#### The Obligation of U.S. Airlines to Offer Refunds for Cancelled Flights

- 9. Frontier is the eighth largest airline in the United States. Last year, the company took in more than \$2.5 billion from operating flights to more than 100 domestic and 30 international destinations.
- 10. When one of its flights is cancelled or significantly altered, the Department of Transportation has long required Frontier to provide full refunds to its customers.

- 11. This requirement has existed since at least July 15, 1996, when the Department's Aviation Enforcement Office advised carriers that refusing to refund a non-refundable fare when a flight is canceled and the passenger wishes to cancel is a violation of 49 U.S.C. 41712 (unfair or deceptive practices) and would subject a carrier to enforcement action.
- 12. The Department of Transportation reiterated this requirement on April 25, 2011, in issuing a final rule to improve the air travel environment for consumers:

We reject some carriers' and carrier associations' assertions that carriers are not required to refund a passenger's fare when a flight is cancelled if the carrier can accommodate the passenger with other transportation options after the cancellation. We find it to be manifestly unfair for a carrier to fail to provide the transportation contracted for and then to refuse to provide a refund if the passenger finds the offered rerouting unacceptable (e.g., greatly delayed or otherwise inconvenient) and he or she no longer wishes to travel.

13. The 2011 final rule required Frontier to adopt and adhere to a Customer Service Plan that, among other things, would promise to provide prompt refunds when ticket refunds were due, including refunding fees charged for optional service that the passenger was unable to use due to a flight cancellation.

## Frontier Incorporates its Refund Obligation Into Its Contracts

- 14. Frontier included its obligation to offer refunds when it cancels or substantially delays flights into the standardized Contract of Carriage that governs its provision of flight services.
- 15. Section 18(C) of the Contract of Carriage is entitled Delay, Misconnection or Cancellation, and provides in relevant part that in the event a flight is cancelled, and Frontier is unable to provide suitable alternative air transportation to a passenger's destination, "Frontier shall, if requested, provide a refund for the unused portion of the passenger's ticket . . ."

- 16. Section 18(B) similarly provides that if Frontier cancels, diverts, or delays any flight due to the occurrence of a force majeure event, it will "provide a refund for the unused portion of the ticket."
- 17. And Frontier confirms in Section 12 of its Customer Service Plan that "if your flight is cancelled we'll provide you, upon request, a full refund of any unused portion of your ticket."

#### Frontier Refuses to Offer Refunds in the Wake of COVID-19

- 18. As COVID-19 began spreading across the United States and most of the country was ordered to take refuge in their homes, demand for air travel plummeted. Passenger volume dropped by some 97%, reaching levels not seen since the 1950s.
- 19. As a result of the decreased demand for its services, Frontier cancelled the vast majority of its scheduled flights. The airline cut more than 90% of its scheduled capacity for April 2020 and will continue to operate far below full capacity until there is a recovery in demand.
- 20. Even as it cancels previously scheduled flights to save money, however, Frontier is not refunding consumers who paid for tickets on those flights—in violation of its Contract of Carriage, Customer Service Plan and Department of Transportation regulations. Frontier is instead giving consumers miles, credits or vouchers that are valid only for future travel and only for a limited time.
- 21. In addition, Frontier has falsely represented to customers who ask for refunds that they are not eligible, changed the information provided on its website to make it appear that customers are not eligible for a refund, and required customers to fill out forms explaining why they need their money back.
- 22. Frontier continues to withhold refunds from consumers even after the Department of Transportation issued a public enforcement notice in response to an increasing number of complaints from consumers given vouchers for future travel instead of refunds.

- 23. The Department's notice was issued on April 3, 2020, emphasized that "[a]lthough the COVID-19 public health emergency has had an unprecedented impact on air travel, the airlines' obligation to refund passengers for cancelled or significantly delayed flights remains unchanged." Frontier and other airlines who were denying their customers refunds were warned that they would be subject to future enforcement actions if they did not timely remedy their non-compliance.
- 24. Over a month later, on May 12, 2020, the Department of Transportation reported that it continued to receive a high volume of complaints. Whereas it typically receives about 1,500 complaints and inquiries each month, the Department received more than 25,000 complaints and inquiries in March 2020 and April 2020, many of which concerned refunds. The Department repeated that it intended to exercise its enforcement discretion and provide carriers with an opportunity to become compliant.
- 25. Frontier also continues to withhold refunds from consumers even though it, unlike its customers, has access to inexpensive credit at a time when record numbers of Americans have lost their jobs and are struggling to make ends meet.

#### **PLAINTIFF'S EXPERIENCE**

- 26. Plaintiff Lakinya Bess is a member of Frontier's Discount Den, a paid subscription service that provides members access to Frontier's most deeply discounted fares.
- 27. Bess purchased tickets directly from Frontier for a flight for herself and her young daughter to travel from San Francisco, California to Baltimore, Maryland on March 17, 2020.
- 28. Frontier cancelled the flight, and notified Bess by email, asking whether she wanted a credit or refund. She replied with an email requesting a refund. Frontier responded by email, informing Bess that her refund would be processed within five to seven business days.
  - 29. Frontier then sent Bess another email advising her that she'd received a

credit of 20,000 miles. She called to complain, saying that she'd requested a refund, not a mileage credit. She was told that by opening the email with the credit offer, she'd accepted it.

30. To date, Bess is yet to receive the refund she is owed.

#### **CLASS ALLEGATIONS**

31. Pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff seeks to pursue her claims on behalf of a class of similarly situated persons. The parameters of the class may be refined through discovery and will be subject to Court approval and modification, but for purposes of this complaint, Plaintiff proposes the following class definition:

All persons residing in the United States who purchased tickets for a Frontier Airlines flight scheduled to depart on or after March 1, 2020, whose flight was cancelled or significantly delayed, and who did not receive a full refund within 20 days of the cancellation.

- 32. The proposed class meets each of the requirements for class certification pursuant to Rule 23(a), Rule 23(b)(2), and Rule 23(b)(3).
- 33. <u>Numerosity</u>: The class is sufficiently numerous such that individual joinders are impracticable. Frontier was scheduled to operate hundreds of flights each day in March and April 2020, cancelled the vast majority of those flights, and has implemented a widespread practice of refusing to give its customers refunds.
- 34. <u>Commonality & Predominance</u>: Common questions of law and fact exist within the proposed class and are likely to predominate over any individualized issues. In particular, common issues of contractual interpretation—namely, whether Frontier's Contract of Carriage obligates it to pay refunds to customers who purchased tickets for flights subsequently cancelled by Frontier are likely to be outcome determinative for the entire class.
  - 35. <u>Typicality</u>: Plaintiff's claims are typical of those asserted by the proposed

class, as Plaintiff and class members each bought tickets for Frontier flights that were subsequently cancelled and each was denied a refund.

- 36. Adequacy: Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the proposed class. Plaintiff's interests do not conflict with the class's interests, as both seek to recover refunds for cancelled flights, and Plaintiff has retained counsel experienced in complex class litigation to represent class members' interests.
- 37. <u>Superiority</u>: A class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy. Frontier has appropriated money that rightfully belongs to thousands of consumers, and only through collective action can that wrong be fully remedied.
- 38. <u>Declaratory Relief</u>: Frontier has refused to issue refunds on grounds that apply generally to the class, such that final injunctive or corresponding declaratory relief is appropriate respecting the class as a whole.

# FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION Breach of Contract

- 39. Plaintiff alleges this cause of action on behalf of herself and the proposed class, and in so doing, incorporates all preceding allegations.
- 40. Frontier offered to provide transportation services to Plaintiff and class members under the terms and conditions set forth in its Contract of Carriage.
- 41. Plaintiff and class members accepted Frontier's offer and by purchasing tickets for transportation on one or more of Frontier's flights.
- 42. Plaintiff and class members did all or substantially all of the things the contract required of them, or were excused from doing those things.
- 43. Frontier breached the contract by cancelling or substantially delaying its flights and failing to promptly refund Plaintiff's and class members' money, as required by its Contract of Carriage.

44. Plaintiff and class members have suffered damages as a result of Frontier's breach of contract, including loss of the use of the money they spent for their tickets.

#### PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, individually and on behalf of members of the proposed class, respectfully requests the following relief:

- A. A determination this action may be maintained as a class action;
- B. An award of damages according to proof;
- C. A declaration that Frontier has a contractual obligation to pay refunds when it cancels or significantly delays a flight;
- D. Pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest, as provided by law;
- E. Attorneys' fees and expenses, including expert fees and costs; and
- F. Any and all other legal and equitable relief that the Court may find appropriate.

#### **JURY DEMAND**

Plaintiff hereby demands a jury trial for all claims so triable.

June 22, 2020 Respectfully submitted,

By: /s/ Karen Barth Menzies

Karen Barth Menzies (SBN 180234) Michael L. Schrag (SBN 185832) Joshua J. Bloomfield (SBN 212172 GIBBS LAW GROUP LLP 505 14th Street, Suite 1110 Oakland, California 94612 (510) 350-9700 (tel.) (510) 350-9701 (fax) Error! Reference source not found.

**Error!** Reference source not found.and the

Proposed Class

JS 44 (Rev. 09/19)

District of Colorado

# **CIVIL COVER SHEET**

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil decket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

purpose of initiating the civil de	ocket sheet. (SEE INSTRUC	TIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF T	THIS FORM.)	1774, is required for the use of	the Clerk of Court for the	
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS LAKINYA BESS			DEFENDANTS FRONTIER AIRLINES, INC.			
(b) County of Residence of (E.)  (c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Karen Barth Menzies GIBBS LAW GROUP LL 505 14th Street, Suite 11	XCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CA  Address, and Telephone Numbe	r)	County of Residence of First Listed Defendant  (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)  NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.  Attorneys (If Known)			
II. BASIS OF JURISDI	ICTION (Place an "X" in C	One Box Only)	I. CITIZENSHIP OF P	RINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintij	
☐ 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff	U.S. Government			<b>TF DEF</b> 1 □ 1 Incorporated <i>or</i> Pr of Business In T		
☐ 2 U.S. Government Defendant	★ 4 Diversity  (Indicate Citizensh	ip of Parties in Item III)	Citizen of Another State	C 2		
			Citizen or Subject of a Foreign Country	3	□ 6 □ 6	
IV. NATURE OF SUIT			FODEFITUDE/PENALTY		of Suit Code Descriptions.	
□ 110 Insurance □ 120 Marine □ 130 Miller Act □ 140 Negotiable Instrument □ 150 Recovery of Overpayment	PERSONAL INJURY  310 Airplane 315 Airplane Product Liability 320 Assault, Libel & Slander 330 Federal Employers' Liability 340 Marine 345 Marine Product Liability 350 Motor Vehicle Product Liability 360 Other Personal Injury 362 Personal Injury Medical Malpractice CIVIL RIGHTS 440 Other Civil Rights 441 Voting 442 Employment 443 Housing/ Accommodations 445 Amer. w/Disabilities - Employment 446 Amer. w/Disabilities - Other 448 Education	PERSONAL INJURY  365 Personal Injury - Product Liability Pharmaceutical Personal Injury - Product Liability  367 Health Care/ Pharmaceutical Personal Injury Product Liability 368 Asbestos Personal Injury Product Liability PERSONAL PROPERTY 370 Other Fraud 371 Truth in Lending 380 Other Personal Property Damage Product Liability  PRISONER PETITIONS Habeas Corpus: 463 Alien Detainee 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence 530 General 535 Death Penalty Other: 540 Mandamus & Other 550 Civil Rights 555 Prison Condition 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Confinement	FORFEITURE/PENALTY    625 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881   690 Other    710 Fair Labor Standards	BANKRUPTCY  □ 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 □ 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157  PROPERTY RIGHTS □ 820 Copyrights □ 830 Patent □ 835 Patent - Abbreviated New Drug Application □ 840 Trademark  SOCIAL SECURITY □ 861 HIA (1395ff) □ 862 Black Lung (923) □ 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) □ 864 SSID Title XVI □ 865 RSI (405(g))  FEDERAL TAX SUITS □ 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant) □ 871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609	OTHER STATUTES  □ 375 False Claims Act □ 376 Qui Tam (31 USC	
Proceeding Sta	moved from atte Court  Cite the U.S. Civil Star 28 U.S.C. § 1332  Brief description of car Breach of Contra	Appellate Court atute under which you are f 2(d)(2), Class Action F ause: ct	Reopened Anothe (specify,	tutes unless diversity):	Litigation - Direct File  AP Docket	
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	CHECK IF THIS UNDER RULE 2	IS A CLASS ACTION 3, F.R.Cv.P.	DEMAND \$	CHECK YES only  JURY DEMAND:	if demanded in complaint:  X Yes □ No	
VIII. RELATED CASI IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE Philip A. Brin	nmer	DOCKET NUMBER _1::	20-cv-1153	
DATE 06/22/2020	signature of attorney of record /s/ Karen Barth Menzies					
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY  RECEIPT # AM	MOUNT	APPLYING IFP	JUDGE	MAG. JUD	OGE	

JS 44 Reverse (Rev. 09/19)

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET FORM JS 44

Authority For Civil Cover Sheet

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and service of pleading or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. The attorney filing a case should complete the form as follows:

- **I.(a) Plaintiffs-Defendants.** Enter names (last, first, middle initial) of plaintiff and defendant. If the plaintiff or defendant is a government agency, use only the full name or standard abbreviations. If the plaintiff or defendant is an official within a government agency, identify first the agency and then the official, giving both name and title.
- (b) County of Residence. For each civil case filed, except U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county where the first listed plaintiff resides at the time of filing. In U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county in which the first listed defendant resides at the time of filing. (NOTE: In land condemnation cases, the county of residence of the "defendant" is the location of the tract of land involved.)
- (c) Attorneys. Enter the firm name, address, telephone number, and attorney of record. If there are several attorneys, list them on an attachment, noting in this section "(see attachment)".
- II. Jurisdiction. The basis of jurisdiction is set forth under Rule 8(a), F.R.Cv.P., which requires that jurisdictions be shown in pleadings. Place an "X" in one of the boxes. If there is more than one basis of jurisdiction, precedence is given in the order shown below.

United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here. United States defendant. (2) When the plaintiff is suing the United States, its officers or agencies, place an "X" in this box.

Federal question. (3) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1331, where jurisdiction arises under the Constitution of the United States, an amendment to the Constitution, an act of Congress or a treaty of the United States. In cases where the U.S. is a party, the U.S. plaintiff or defendant code takes precedence, and box 1 or 2 should be marked.

Diversity of citizenship. (4) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1332, where parties are citizens of different states. When Box 4 is checked, the citizenship of the different parties must be checked. (See Section III below; **NOTE: federal question actions take precedence over diversity cases.**)

- III. Residence (citizenship) of Principal Parties. This section of the JS 44 is to be completed if diversity of citizenship was indicated above. Mark this section for each principal party.
- IV. Nature of Suit. Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If there are multiple nature of suit codes associated with the case, pick the nature of suit code that is most applicable. Click here for: Nature of Suit Code Descriptions.
- V. Origin. Place an "X" in one of the seven boxes.

Original Proceedings. (1) Cases which originate in the United States district courts.

Removed from State Court. (2) Proceedings initiated in state courts may be removed to the district courts under Title 28 U.S.C., Section 1441.

Remanded from Appellate Court. (3) Check this box for cases remanded to the district court for further action. Use the date of remand as the filing date

Reinstated or Reopened. (4) Check this box for cases reinstated or reopened in the district court. Use the reopening date as the filing date. Transferred from Another District. (5) For cases transferred under Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1404(a). Do not use this for within district transfers or multidistrict litigation transfers.

Multidistrict Litigation – Transfer. (6) Check this box when a multidistrict case is transferred into the district under authority of Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1407.

Multidistrict Litigation – Direct File. (8) Check this box when a multidistrict case is filed in the same district as the Master MDL docket.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS NOT AN ORIGIN CODE 7. Origin Code 7 was used for historical records and is no longer relevant due to changes in statue.

- VI. Cause of Action. Report the civil statute directly related to the cause of action and give a brief description of the cause. **Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity.** Example: U.S. Civil Statute: 47 USC 553 Brief Description: Unauthorized reception of cable service
- VII. Requested in Complaint. Class Action. Place an "X" in this box if you are filing a class action under Rule 23, F.R.Cv.P.

  Demand. In this space enter the actual dollar amount being demanded or indicate other demand, such as a preliminary injunction.

  Jury Demand. Check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not a jury is being demanded.
- VIII. Related Cases. This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases, if any. If there are related pending cases, insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judge names for such cases.

Date and Attorney Signature. Date and sign the civil cover sheet.

# Un

ITED STATES	DISTRICT COURT
fo	or the
District o	f Colorado
	)
	)
	)
	)

Civil Action No.

*Plaintiff(s)* v. FRONTIER AIRLINES. INC. Defendant(s)

LAKINYA BESS

#### SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address) FRONTIER AIRLINES, INC. c/o Corporation Service Company 1900 W. Littleton Blvd. Littleton, CO 80120

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

Karen Barth Menzies Gibbs Law Group LLP 505 14th Street, Suite 1110 Oakland, CA 94612 Telephone: (510) 350-9700

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

	CLERK OF COURT
Date:	
	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

#### PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (1))

	This summons for (nar	ne of individual and title, if any)						
was re	ceived by me on (date)	·						
	☐ I personally served	the summons on the individual	at (place)					
			on (date)	; or				
	☐ I left the summons	at the individual's residence or	usual place of abode with (name)					
	, a person of suitable age and discretion who resides ther							
	on (date), and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or							
	☐ I served the summo	ons on (name of individual)		, who is				
	designated by law to	accept service of process on beh	alf of (name of organization)					
			on (date)	; or				
	☐ I returned the sumr	mons unexecuted because		; or				
	☐ Other (specify):							
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a total of \$	0.00				
	I declare under penalty	y of perjury that this information	is true.					
Date:								
			Server's signature					
			Printed name and title					
			Server's address					

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc: