

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

DAMIEN SHEPPARD,

Docket No.: 1:24-cv-01191

Plaintiff,

- against -

SENSIO, INC.,

**COMPLAINT AND DEMAND FOR
JURY TRIAL**

Defendant.

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, by and through his attorneys, **JOHNSON BECKER, PLLC** and **MILBERG COLEMAN BRYSON PHILLIPS GROSSMAN, LLC**, upon information and belief, at all times hereinafter mentioned, alleges as follows:

NATURE OF THE CASE

1. Defendant Sensio, Inc. (“Sensio” or “Defendant”) designs, manufactures, markets, imports, distributes, and sells a wide range of consumer kitchen products, including the subject “Bella 5qt Pressure Cooker,” which specifically includes the Model Number JY-PC20US-11P (referred to hereafter as “pressure cooker(s)”) that is at issue in this case.

2. Defendant boasts that its pressure cookers feature an “[e]xtremely safe and secure locking system”¹ or “safety valve” which creates “added safety and control” and allows the consumer to “cook a variety of foods.”² Despite Defendant’s claims of “safety,” it designed, manufactured, marketed, imported, distributed and sold, both directly and through third-party retailers, a product

¹ See <https://bellahousewares.com/products-bella/5qt-pressure-cooker/>

² *Id.*

that suffers from serious and dangerous defects. Said defects cause significant risk of bodily harm and injury to its consumers.

3. Specifically, said defects manifest themselves when, despite Defendant's statements, the lid of the pressure cooker is removable with built-up pressure, heat and steam still inside the unit. When the lid is removed under such circumstances, the pressure trapped within the unit causes the scalding hot contents to be projected from the unit and into the surrounding area, including onto the unsuspecting consumers, their families and other bystanders. Plaintiff was able to remove the lid while the pressure cooker retained pressure, causing Plaintiff serious and substantial bodily injuries and damages.

4. On August 10th, 2023, the Consumer Products Safety Commission ("CPSC") announced a recall of more than 860,000 of Defendants' pressure cookers, which includes the subject pressure cooker, after receiving "63 reports of incidents, **including 61 burn injuries**, some of which involved **second and third degree burns to the face, torso, arms, and hands.**"³

5. Defendant knew or should have known of these defects but have nevertheless put profit ahead of safety by continuing to sell its pressure cookers to consumers, failing to warn said consumers of the serious risks posed by the defects, and failing to timely recall the dangerously defective pressure cookers regardless of the risk of significant injuries to Plaintiff and consumers like him.

6. Defendant ignored and/or concealed its knowledge of these defects in its pressure cookers from Plaintiffs in this case, as well as the public in general, in order to continue generating a profit

³ See <https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls/2023/Sensio-Recalls-Bella-Bella-Pro-Series-Cooks-and-Crux-Electric-and-Stovetop-Pressure-Cookers-Due-to-Burn-Hazard> (last accessed February 9, 2024)

from the sale of said pressure cookers, demonstrating a callous, reckless, willful, depraved indifference to the health, safety and welfare of Plaintiff and others like him.

7. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant's conduct, Plaintiff incurred significant and painful bodily injuries, medical expenses, physical pain, mental anguish, and diminished enjoyment of life.

PLAINTIFF DAMIEN SHEPPARD

8. Plaintiff is a resident and citizen of the city of Lake Elsinore, County of Riverside, State of California.

9. On or about December 13, 2024, Plaintiff suffered serious and substantial burn injuries as the direct and proximate result of the Pressure Cooker's lid being able to be rotated and opened while the Pressure Cooker was still under pressure, during the normal, directed use of the Pressure Cooker, allowing its scalding hot contents to be forcefully ejected from the Pressure Cooker and onto Plaintiff. The incident occurred as a result of the failure of the Pressure Cooker's supposed "safety" features, which purport to keep the consumer safe while using the Pressure Cooker. In addition, the incident occurred as the result of Defendant's failure to redesign the Pressure Cooker, despite the existence of economical, safer alternative designs.

DEFENDANT SENSIO, INC.

10. Defendant designs, manufactures, markets, imports, distributes and sells a variety of consumer kitchen products including pressure cookers, air fryers, and pressure cookers, amongst others.

11. Defendant Sensio is a New York corporation with its principal place of business at 261 Madison Avenue, 25th Floor, New York, NY 100168. Defendant is, therefore, a citizen of the State of New York for purposes of diversity jurisdiction as prescribed by 28 U.S.C. § 1332.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

12. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this case pursuant to diversity jurisdiction prescribed by 28 U.S.C. § 1332 because the matter in controversy exceeds the sum or value of \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs, and there is complete diversity between the parties.

13. Plaintiff is a resident and citizen of the city of Riverside, County of Corona, State of California. Plaintiff is therefore, a citizen of the State of California for purposes of diversity jurisdiction as prescribed by 28 U.S.C. § 1332.

14. Venue is also proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391 because Defendant is a resident of this District and have sufficient minimum contacts with the State of New York and intentionally avails itself of the markets within New York through the promotion, sale, marketing, and distribution of their products.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

15. Defendant is engaged in the business of designing, manufacturing, warranting, marketing, importing, distributing and selling the pressure cookers at issue in this litigation.

16. Defendant boasts that its pressure cookers feature an “[e]xtremely safe and secure locking system”⁴ or “safety valve” which creates “added safety and control” and allows the consumer to “cook a variety of foods.”⁵ Defendant Bella also claims that the “Bella 6Qt pressure cooker is the latest generation multi-use kitchen appliance”⁶ and that it features a “unique pressure release button to quickly expel pressure” to purportedly protect the user from hot steam.

⁴ See <https://bellahousewares.com/products-bella/5qt-pressure-cooker/> (last accessed November 1, 2020).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

17. According to the Owner's Manual accompanying each individual unit sold, the pressure cookers feature a "safety valve" which purportedly keeps the lid from the pressure cooker from opening once pressurize. Specifically:

- a. WHEN COOKING UNDER PRESSURE, THE PRESSURE COOKER CANNOT BE OPENED ONCE PRESSURE IS REACHED. DO NOT TRY TO FORCE THE LID OPEN.⁷

18. By reason of the forgoing acts or omissions, Plaintiff used the pressure cooker with the reasonable expectation that it was properly designed and manufactured, free from defects of any kind, and that it was safe for its intended, foreseeable use of cooking.

19. Plaintiff used the pressure cooker for its intended purpose of preparing meals and did so in a manner that was reasonable and foreseeable by the Defendant.

20. However, the aforementioned pressure cooker was defectively and negligently designed and manufactured by the Defendant in that it failed to properly function as to prevent the lid from being removed with normal force while the unit remained pressurized, despite the appearance that all the pressure had been released, during the ordinary, foreseeable and proper use of cooking food with the product; placing the Plaintiffs, his family, and similar consumers in danger while using the pressure cookers.

21. Defendant's pressure cookers possess defects that make them unreasonably dangerous for their intended use by consumers because the lid can be rotated and opened while the unit remains pressurized.

22. Further, Defendant's representations about "safety" are not just misleading, they are flatly wrong, and put innocent consumers like Plaintiff directly in harm's way.

⁷ See Bella 5qt Pressure Cooker Model No. JY-PC20US-1P Owner's Manual, pg.6.

23. Economic, safer alternative designs were available that could have prevented the Pressure Cooker's lid from being rotated and opened while pressurized.

24. Defendant knew or should have known that its pressure cookers possessed defects that pose a serious safety risk to Plaintiff and the public. Nevertheless, Defendant continues to ignore and/or conceal its knowledge of the pressure cookers' defects from the general public and continues to generate a substantial profit from the sale of their pressure cookers, demonstrating a callous, reckless, willful, depraved indifference to the health, safety and welfare of Plaintiff and others like him.

25. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant's intentional concealment of such defects, its failure to warn consumers of such defects, its negligent misrepresentations, its failure to remove a product with such defects from the stream of commerce, and its negligent design of such products, Plaintiff used an unreasonably dangerous pressure cooker, which resulted in significant and painful bodily injuries upon the simple removal of the lid of the pressure cooker.

26. Consequently, Plaintiff seeks damages, including punitive damages, resulting from the use of Defendant's pressure cooker as described above, which has caused the Plaintiff to suffer from serious bodily injuries, medical expenses, physical pain, mental anguish, diminished enjoyment of life, and other damages.

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

COUNT I **STRICT LIABILITY**

27. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each preceding and succeeding paragraph as though set forth fully at length herein.

28. At the time of Plaintiff's injuries, Defendant's Pressure Cookers were defective and unreasonably dangerous for use by foreseeable consumers, including Plaintiff.

29. Defendant's Pressure Cookers were in the same or substantially similar condition as when they left the possession of Defendant.

30. Plaintiff did not misuse or materially alter their respective Pressure Cookers.

31. The Pressure Cookers did not perform as safely as an ordinary consumer would have expected them to perform when used in a reasonably foreseeable way.

32. Further, a reasonable person would conclude that the possibility and seriousness of harm outweighs the burden or cost of making the Pressure Cookers safe. Specifically:

- a. The Pressure Cookers designed, manufactured, sold, and supplied by Defendant were defectively designed and placed into the stream of commerce in a defective and unreasonably dangerous condition for consumers;
- b. The seriousness of the potential burn injuries resulting from the product drastically outweighs any benefit that could be derived from its normal, intended use;
- c. Defendant failed to properly market, design, manufacture, distribute, supply, and sell the Pressure Cookers, despite having extensive knowledge that the aforementioned injuries could and did occur;
- d. Defendant failed to warn and place adequate warnings and instructions on the Pressure Cookers;
- e. Defendant failed to adequately test the Pressure Cookers; and
- f. Defendant failed to market an economically feasible alternative design, despite the existence of the aforementioned economical, safer alternatives, that could have prevented the Plaintiff's injuries and damages.

33. Defendant's actions and omissions were the direct and proximate cause of the Plaintiff's injuries and damages.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant for compensatory and punitive damages, together with interest, costs of suit, attorneys' fees, and all such other relief as the Court deems proper.

COUNT II
NEGLIGENCE

34. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each preceding and succeeding paragraph as though set forth fully at length herein.

35. Defendant has a duty of reasonable care to design, manufacture, market, and sell non-defective Pressure Cookers that are reasonably safe for their intended uses by consumers, such as Plaintiffs and their family.

36. Defendant failed to exercise ordinary care in the manufacture, sale, warnings, quality assurance, quality control, distribution, advertising, promotion, sale and marketing of its Pressure Cookers in that Defendant knew or should have known that said Pressure Cookers created a high risk of unreasonable harm to the Plaintiffs and consumers alike.

37. Defendant was negligent in the design, manufacture, advertising, warning, marketing and sale of its Pressure Cookers in that, among other things, it:

- a. Failed to use due care in designing and manufacturing the Pressure Cookers to avoid the aforementioned risks to individuals;
- b. Placed an unsafe product into the stream of commerce;
- c. Aggressively over-promoted and marketed its Pressure Cookers through television, social media, and other advertising outlets; and
- d. Were otherwise careless or negligent.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant for compensatory and punitive damages, together with interest, costs of suit, attorneys' fees, and all such other relief as the Court deems proper.

COUNT III
NEGLIGENT DESIGN DEFECT

38. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each preceding and succeeding paragraph as though set forth fully at length herein.

39. Defendant is the manufacturer, seller, distributor, marketer, and supplier of the subject Pressure Cookers, which was negligently designed.

40. Defendant failed to exercise reasonable care in designing, developing, manufacturing, inspecting, testing, packaging, selling, distributing, labeling, marketing, and promoting its Pressure Cookers, which were defective and presented an unreasonable risk of harm to consumers, such as the Plaintiffs.

41. As a result, the subject Pressure Cookers, including Plaintiffs' Pressure Cooker, contain defects in their design which renders them unreasonably dangerous to consumers, such as the Plaintiff, when used as intended or as reasonably foreseeable to Defendant. The defect in the design allows consumers such as Plaintiff to open the lid while the unit remains pressurized, despite the appearance that all the pressure has been released from the unit, and causes an unreasonable increased risk of injury, including, but not limited to, first, second and third-degree scald burns.

42. Plaintiff used his Pressure Cooker in a reasonably foreseeable manner and did so as substantially intended by Defendant.

43. The subject Pressure Cooker was not materially altered or modified after being manufactured by Defendant and before being used by Plaintiff.

44. The design defects allowing the lid to open while the unit was still pressurized directly rendered the Pressure Cookers defective and were the direct and proximate result of Defendant's negligence and failure to use reasonable care in designing, testing, manufacturing, and promoting the Pressure Cookers.

45. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant's negligent design of its Pressure Cookers, the Plaintiff in this case suffered injuries and damages described herein.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant for compensatory and punitive damages, together with interest, costs of suit, attorneys' fees, and all such other relief as

the Court deems proper.

COUNT IV
NEGLIGENT FAILURE TO WARN

46. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each preceding and succeeding paragraph as though set forth fully herein.

47. At the time in which the Pressure Cooker was purchased, up through the time Plaintiff was injured, Defendant knew or had reason to know that its Pressure Cookers were dangerous and created an unreasonable risk of harm to consumers.

48. Defendant had a duty to exercise reasonable care to warn consumers of the dangerous conditions or the facts that made its Pressure Cookers likely to be dangerous.

49. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant's negligent failure to warn of the dangers of its Pressure Cookers, the Plaintiff in this case suffered injuries and damages described herein.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant for compensatory and punitive damages, together with interest, costs of suit, attorneys' fees, and all such other relief as the Court deems proper.

COUNT V
BREACH OF IMPLIED WARRANTY OF FITNESS
FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE

50. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each preceding and succeeding paragraph as though set forth fully at length herein.

51. Defendant manufactured, supplied, and sold its Pressure Cookers with an implied warranty that they were fit for the particular purpose of cooking quickly, efficiently and safely.

52. Members of the consuming public, including consumers such as Plaintiff, were the intended third-party beneficiaries of the warranty.

53. Defendant's Pressure Cookers were not fit for the particular purpose as a safe means of cooking, due to the unreasonable risks of bodily injury associated with their use.

54. Plaintiff reasonably relied on Defendant's representations that its Pressure Cookers were a quick, effective and safe means of cooking.

55. Defendant's breach of the implied warranty of fitness for a particular purpose was the direct and proximate cause of Plaintiffs' injuries and damages.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant for compensatory and punitive damages, together with interest, costs of suit, attorneys' fees, and all such other relief as the Court deems proper.

COUNT VI
BREACH OF IMPLIED WARRANTY OF MERCHANTABILITY

56. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each preceding and succeeding paragraph as though set forth fully at length herein.

57. At the time Defendant marketed, distributed and sold its Pressure Cookers to Plaintiff, Defendant warranted that its Pressure Cookers were merchantable and fit for the ordinary purposes for which they were intended.

58. Members of the consuming public, including consumers such as Plaintiff, were intended third-party beneficiaries of the warranty.

59. Defendant's Pressure Cookers were not merchantable and fit for its ordinary purpose, because they had the propensity to lead to the serious personal injuries as described herein in this Complaint.

60. Plaintiff purchased the Pressure Cooker with the reasonable expectation that it was properly designed and manufactured, free from defects of any kind, and that they were safe for its intended, foreseeable use of cooking.

61. Defendant's breach of implied warranty of merchantability was the direct and proximate cause of Plaintiff's injury and damages.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant for compensatory and punitive damages, together with interest, costs of suit, attorneys' fees, and all such other relief as the Court deems proper.

COUNT VII

PUNITIVE DAMAGES

62. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each of the allegations set forth in this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

63. The acts, conduct, and omissions of Defendant, as alleged throughout this Complaint, were willful and malicious. It is unconscionable and outrageous that Defendant would risk the health, safety, and well-being of consumers, including the Plaintiff in this case. Despite its knowledge that the lid could be prematurely removed while the unit remained pressurized, Defendant made conscious decisions not to redesign, despite the existence of an economically feasible, safer alternative design, and not to adequately label, warn or inform the unsuspecting consuming public about the dangers associated with the use of their pressure cookers. Defendants' outrageous conduct rises to the level that Plaintiff should be awarded punitive damages to deter Defendant from this type of outrageous conduct in the future, as well as to discourage other Defendants from placing profit above the safety of consumers in the United States of America.

64. Prior to and during the manufacturing, sale, and distribution of its pressure cookers, Defendant knew that said pressure cookers were in a defective condition as previously described herein and knew that those who purchased and used their pressure cookers, including Plaintiff, could experience severe physical, mental, and emotional injuries.

65. Further, Defendant knew that its pressure cookers presented a substantial and unreasonable risk of harm to the public, including Plaintiff, and as such, Defendant unreasonably subjected consumers of said pressure cookers to risk of serious and permanent injury from their use.

66. Despite its knowledge, Defendant, for the purpose of enhancing their profit, knowingly and deliberately failed to remedy the known defects in their pressure cookers, and failed to warn the public, including Plaintiff, of the extreme risk of injury occasioned by said defects inherent in them. Defendant intentionally proceeded with the manufacturing, sale, distribution and marketing of their pressure cookers knowing these actions would expose consumers, such as the Plaintiff, to serious danger in order to advance their pecuniary interest and monetary profit.

67. Defendants' conduct was despicable and so contemptible that it would be looked down upon and despised by ordinary decent people and was carried on by Defendants with willful and conscious disregard for the safety of the Plaintiff, his family, and consumers like them, entitling the Plaintiff to punitive damages.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant for compensatory and punitive damages, together with interest, costs of suit, attorneys' fees, and all such other relief as the Court deems proper.

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff demands that all issues of fact of this case be tried to a properly impaneled jury to the extent permitted under the law.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demands judgment against the Defendant for damages, to which she is entitled by law, including punitive damages according to proof, as well as all costs of this action, interest and attorneys' fees, to the full extent of the law, whether arising under the common law and/or statutory law, including:

- a. judgment for Plaintiffs and against Defendant;
- b. damages to compensate Plaintiff for his injuries, economic losses and pain and suffering sustained as a result of the use of the Defendant's Pressure cookers;
- c. pre and post judgment interest at the lawful rate;
- d. punitive damages on all applicable counts;
- e. a trial by jury on all issues of the case;
- f. an award of attorneys' fees; and
- g. for any other relief as this Court may deem equitable and just, or that may be available under the law of another forum to the extent the law of another forum is applied, including but not limited to all reliefs prayed for in this Complaint and in the foregoing Prayer for Relief.

Date: February 16, 2024

Respectfully submitted,

**MILBERG COLEMAN BRYSON PHILLIPS
GROSSMAN, LLC**

/s/ Randi Kassan, Esq.

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