

Business

LL Bean faces lawsuit over return policy change



Robert F. Bukaty | AP | BDN

In this March 16, 2016, file photo, shoppers exit the L.L. Bean retail store in Freeport, Maine. L.L. Bean is tightening its generous return policy by imposing a one-year limit on most returns to reduce abuse and fraud. Executives say returns of severely worn items have doubled over five years. Under the new policy announced Friday, Feb. 9, 2018, the company will accept returns for one year with a proof of purchase and will continue to replace products for manufacturing defects beyond that.

By **Lori Valigra** • February 13, 2018 6:32 pm

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An L.L. Bean customer has filed suit in Chicago federal court against the Freeport company's **recent move to end its lifetime return policy** to reduce abuse and fraud.

The **16-page lawsuit**, filed Monday in Illinois Northern District Court by lead plaintiff Victor Bondi, says he is a loyal customer who made purchases based on L.L. Bean's unconditional satisfaction guarantee.

The proposed suit includes more than 100 people seeking at least \$5 million in damages, excluding interest and costs.

The lawsuit includes images of two L.L. Bean catalog covers stating, “100% Satisfaction Guarantee. No Conditions. No End Date.” The new policy imposes a one-year restriction on returns and requires proof of purchase.

“Plaintiff and the other class members paid a particular price for L.L. Bean merchandise and a warranty with certain terms,” the lawsuit states. “When L.L. Bean announced those terms would be dishonored, plaintiff and the other class members were deprived of their benefit of the bargain.”

Bondi, who is represented by Chicago attorney Ben Barnow, brought the class-action suit and a related subclass suit for Illinois residents who bought items from L.L. Bean before the return policy changed on Feb. 9.

Bondi wants the outdoor goods retailer to honor the original guarantee or place notices in its catalogs about the new policy. He also wants L.L. Bean to admit its changed policy violates the Magnuson Moss Warranty Act and the Illinois Consumer Fraud Act.

L.L. Bean spokeswoman Carolyn Beem denied any wrongdoing.

“The recently filed lawsuit misrepresents the terms of our new returns policy.

L.L.Bean products bought prior to Feb. 9, 2018 will not be subject to the new one-year restriction,” she wrote in an email response to the Bangor Daily News.

“Proof of purchase will continue to be required. That is what we have consistently told customers since the new policy was announced last Friday.”

Beem told the Associated Press earlier that the company had lost \$250 million on “destroy quality” returned items over the past five years.

Barnow was not immediately available for comment on the lawsuit.

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