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**Yale to update policies after lawsuit over student mental health**

Settlement comes after current and former students had alleged they were pressured to withdraw from the university

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Yale University in New Haven, Conn. (Stan Godlewski for The Washington Post)

Yale University has agreed to change some policies and revise training as part of a legal settlement after current and former students claimed the school discriminated against people with mental health problems.

The lawsuitfiledlast year claimed school officials pressured students with suicidal thoughts to withdraw from the university.

Court documents filed Friday show Yale College agreed to change undergraduate policies to clarify that students who were classified as taking medical withdrawals from Yale were taking medical leaves of absence, and to make clear to medical and mental health providers that there is no policy prohibiting support for students’ requests for academic accommodations because of mental health issues.

Under the terms of the agreement,which is subject to approval by the court, the school also agreed to revise training, provide clear information about academic accommodations for students seeking treatment, publicize data about students on medical leaves and pay plaintiffs’ legal fees.

The dean of Yale College agreed to meet with plaintiffs from [Elis for Rachael](https://www.elisforrachael.org/message-for-efr-community), a group formed after the death by suicide of a student, to discuss their experiences and concerns.

Dean Pericles Lewis said in a statement Friday that he was pleased with the outcome. Students and alumni had shared constructive ideas with Yale administrators and clinicians, he said, “and my hope is that the changes that have emerged from these discussions will make it easier for students to ask for support, focus on their health and well-being, and take time off if they wish, knowing that they can resume their studies when they are ready.”

“Over the past few years, Yale has significantly expanded resources for students seeking support,” Lewis said. “I hope students will continue to take advantage of those resources, as needed, throughout their time here.”

[*‘What if Yale finds out?’*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/11/11/yale-suicides-mental-health-withdrawals/?itid=lk_interstitial_manual_13)

In the November [lawsuit](https://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Elis-for-Rachael-Inc.-et.-al-v.-Yale-Case.pdf), students described in court documents being visited by Yale officials while hospitalized for suicide attempts or other mental health problems and being told if they didn’t leave the school voluntarily, the university could kick them out.

It was filed soon after a [Washington Post story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/11/11/yale-suicides-mental-health-withdrawals/?itid=lk_inline_manual_16) recounted the experiences of more than two dozen current and former students who said their struggles with mental health issues were worsened by university policies.

The case came at a time of heightened concern about mental health among young people [after the pandemic](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/03/30/college-students-mental-health-pandemic/?itid=lk_inline_manual_18) shut down schools, upended normal routines and left many with mostly virtual connections to others.

[*A mental health crisis was spreading on college campuses. The pandemic has made it worse.*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/03/30/college-students-mental-health-pandemic/?itid=lk_interstitial_manual_19)

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court of Connecticut, did not seek monetary damages. It called for changes to what it claimed were discriminatory practices and policies at the university, such as offering reduced course loads rather than forcing students to either withdraw or continue with full-time studies.

At the time, a university spokeswoman, Karen Peart, said Yale was confident that its policies complied with all applicable laws and regulations, but that school officials had been working on policy changes responsive to students’ emotional and financial well-being.

[*Yale changes mental health policies for students in crisis*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/11/11/yale-suicides-mental-health-withdrawals/?itid=lk_interstitial_manual_22)

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of two current students, three former students and an alumni group representing several dozen others, by lawyers from [Disability Rights Connecticut](http://www.disrightsct.org), [the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law](http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NEWS-Mental-Health-Lawsuit-Filed-Against-Yale-University-11.30.22.pdf), and Vladeck, Raskin & Clark.

[The agreement](https://www.elisforrachael.org/_files/ugd/12d8cb_f0ec9ecfc38943b18bb2bdf7f25666e8.pdf)would simplify requirements for returning from medical leave, ensure more access to campus resources for students on leave, allow some students to study part-time, as well as continue some access to health care and other benefits. Yale also agreed to include three-day period during which students can change their mind about taking medical leave, which advocates hope will prevent students from feeling pressured into the decision.

Melanie Boyd, dean of student affairs at Yale College, sent an email to students Friday welcoming them to campus and detailing resources and policies for students in need of support. “The most notable change was last year’s creation of a medical leave of absence — formerly a medical withdrawal — that gives students more flexibility with health insurance, campus jobs, class registration, and other elements of student life,” she wrote. “This summer, other policies have now been adapted to provide more flexibility in the minimum courseload for students in urgent medical circumstances.”

The changes are a powerful statement for students with mental health needs, said Rishi Mirchandani, 26, a witness in the case and a co-founder of Elis for Rachael, a group that formed after the suicide of first-year student Rachael Shaw-Rosenbaum in 2021. He said the previous policies made students who were struggling feel excluded and forced to counter logistical, financial and psychological challenges. “The terms of this settlement fix many of those issues,” he said, and can help students feel like they belong.

The group said in a statement Friday that they welcomed the agreement and would continue to advocate for other changes, including greater support to low-income students who may need it.

Mirchandani withdrew from Yale in 2018 after a mental health crisis and said his first application to return was rejected despite recommendations by his medical providers that he was ready and that it would benefit his mental health. He was eventually able to return to the university, graduated with highest honors in 2019, and is now a classical pianist based in New York.

He said there is still work to be done, including on student housing issues, but the settlement will save lives.

“Today I feel like a really proud Yale alum,” he said. “We did this work out of love for Yale more than anything else. It’s so gratifying to see how our community is going to benefit.”

*If you or someone you know needs help, visit*[*988lifeline.org*](https://988lifeline.org/)*or call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988. You can also reach a crisis counselor by messaging the*[*Crisis Text Line*](https://www.crisistextline.org/)*at 741741.*

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