

# Yale University sued over student mental health policies

WSHU | By [Brian Scott-Smith, Associated Press](#)

Published December 1, 2022 at 3:30 PM EST



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Yale University is accused in a federal lawsuit filed Wednesday of discriminating against students with mental health disabilities, including pressuring some to withdraw from the prestigious institution and then placing “unreasonable burdens” on those who seek to be reinstated.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Connecticut on behalf of current and former students seeks no monetary damages. Rather, it demands changes to Yale's withdrawal policies, including the required forfeiture of health insurance and tuition payments, among other rules.

“Yale’s withdrawal policies and practices push students with mental health disabilities

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unreasonable burdens on students who, after a withdrawal, seek reinstatement,” according to the suit, which contends that the burden is most harsh on students “from less privileged backgrounds.”

The plaintiffs contend that Yale needs to implement a process for handling students with mental health needs that's more accommodating for individuals.

Deborah Dorfman, an attorney and the executive director of Disability Rights Connecticut, said Yale's treatment of students with mental health issues is swift and harsh.

“Cut[ting] them off from campus, housing, health insurance, student groups and other types of activities,” Dorfman said, “and then [they] have unreasonable policies and procedures for a student to be reinstated.”

In a Nov. 16 letter to alumni in response to a Washington Post article about student mental health and Yale's withdrawal and readmission policies, President Peter Salovey said colleges and universities in the last few years have seen a surge in demand for mental health services that was exacerbated by the pandemic. He said Yale has since dropped the requirement that students who have withdrawn from Yale must take two courses at another school before they could seek readmission.

“We also simplified the process for students in other ways, including dropping an informational interview with the chair of the reinstatement committee, which students told us could be intimidating,” wrote Salvoney, who noted other changes, including adding more mental health support services for students.

The Washington Post [reports](#) that in recent years, Yale has experienced an “explosion in demand for mental health counseling.” Last year, 5,000 Yale students sought treatment, a 90% increase compared to 2015.

“Each person is different and their mental health disability will affect them differently,” said Dorfman in a statement. “We're really advocating here for individual assessments of each student's situation and also full consideration of all of the possible reasonable accommodations that might work for the student.”

That means almost 34% of the 14,500 students at Yale seek mental health help from

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Rishi Mirchandani is with Elis for Rachael, one of the alumni groups involved in the lawsuit. The group was formed last year after a student’s death by suicide. Mirchandani said Yale may take a different approach with legal pressure from current and former students.

“In the past, Yale has been able to just wait out waves of activism on campus because they were primarily run by students. Yale knew that those students would graduate generally within 4 years and so that wave of activism would naturally subside,” Mirchandani said. “That strategy has worked in the past but it’s not going to work now.”

The lawsuit seeks certification to be a class action, ultimately representing more than 1,300 current students as well as alumni.

In a statement, Yale University said they have made changes to their policies in recent years and will continue to work towards increasing resources to help students. Karen Peart, a spokesperson for Yale, said the school's faculty, staff and leaders care deeply for the students.

“We recognize how distressing and difficult it is for the student and their loves ones when a student is facing mental health challenges. When we make decisions and set policies, our primary focus is on students’ safety and health, especially when they are most vulnerable,” said Peart. She said the school has taken steps in recent years to simply the process of students returning to school from medical withdrawals and to increase mental health resources.

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**Brian Scott-Smith**

An award-winning freelance reporter/host for WSHU, Brian lives in southeastern Connecticut and covers stories for WSHU across the Eastern side of the state.

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