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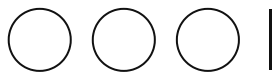
NEWS

Yale requests settlement conference for mental health discrimination lawsuit



Meghan Friedmann

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The entrance to Yale University's Old Campus across from the New Haven Green Feb. 9, 2021.
 Arnold Gold / Hearst Connecticut Media file photo

NEW HAVEN – Yale University has signaled a willingness to enter settlement discussions as it faces a pending lawsuit over its treatment of students with mental health disabilities.

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The university filed a joint motion Wednesday case to a magistrate for a settlement conference according to Connecticut federal court records.

Disability Rights of Connecticut, Inc., which is case, also signed onto the motion.

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"The parties have agreed to place the litigation on hold while they discuss ways to resolve the complaint and achieve their mutual goals," Karen Peart, a spokesperson for Yale, said in statement Thursday afternoon.



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The advocacy group Elis for Rachael, Inc. took Yale to court late last month as part of an effort to change the university's treatment of students with mental health disabilities.

In particular, the lawsuit centers around Yale's withdrawal policies for students who seek mental healthcare.

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It alleges the university “engages in a practice of pressuring students to take ‘voluntary’ time off when they experience significant symptoms from a mental health disability” and then requires them to go through a “daunting reinstatement process” before they return to campus.



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A student who withdraws “does not have the option to continue health insurance, is banned from campus, must relinquish their housing, may lose tuition, room, and board fees already paid, and must remain away for a prescribed minimum period of time, even if they can provide documentation from a medical provider recommending that they return earlier,” according to the lawsuit.

The litigation, which does not seek monetary relief but asks Yale to end the alleged discriminatory practices, comes after [a Washington Post report](#) raised concerns over the withdrawal policies and sparked pushback from the university president.

The Post reported that a student who attempted to kill herself after she was raped was pressured to withdraw from the university and later had to go through a strenuous readmission process.

Following the report’s publication, Yale University President Peter Salovey issued [a statement](#) calling it “deeply disturbing for the misinformation it contains.”



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“The article fails to acknowledge the support, processes, and policies in place or the positive outcomes associated with our work,” the statement said.

Salovey also said the university had “simplified” its reinstatement processes by removing a requirement that students who withdraw from the university take two courses before returning and by “dropping an informational interview with the chair of the reinstatement committee.”

“In recent years, over 90 percent of students who were medically withdrawn are reinstated at their first request; over 99 percent on their second; and 100 percent by their third request,” the statement said.

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But within weeks, Yale found itself in federal court over related concerns. In addition to allegations that the university's withdrawal policies "push students with mental health disabilities out of Yale," the lawsuit contends Yale "makes it unreasonably difficult to secure accommodations for disabilities in coursework or housing."



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“When we make decisions and set policies, our primary focus is on students' safety and health, especially when they are most vulnerable,” Yale University spokesperson Karen Peart said in a statement issued after the lawsuit was filed. “We believe in creating and sustaining strong and sensible support structures for our students, and in many cases, the safest plan includes the student's parents and family.”

Peart also wrote that the “university is confident that our policies comply with all applicable laws and regulations.”

“Nonetheless, we have been working on policy changes that are responsive to students' emotional and financial wellbeing,” she said.

An email asking if Yale has taken any action steps in response to concerns raised in the lawsuit was sent to Peart Thursday.



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Inquiries also were sent to Deborah Dorfman,
Connecticut who is working on the case.

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Reach Meghan on

Meghan Friedmann is a reporter with the New Haven Register, covering North Branford, Guilford and Madison. Before joining the Register, she worked on an independent journalism project about migration in Berlin, Germany. When she's not reporting, you can find her hiking Shoreline trails and eating her way through New Haven. She welcomes feedback and story ideas from readers.

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