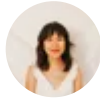


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# Yale University sued over discriminating against students with mental health disabilities

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USA TODAY

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Current and former students of Yale University sued the school Wednesday, accusing the school of discriminating against students with mental health disabilities and pressuring them to withdraw.

The 41-page lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court in Connecticut and primarily seeks to change Yale's withdrawal policies, including the mandatory relinquishment of health insurance and tuition payments. The complaint alleged that some students have been pressured to withdraw from the institution and those who sought to be reinstated were given "unreasonable burdens."

In response to the lawsuit, Yale University spokesperson Karen Peart said the school has been working on policy changes "that are responsive to students' emotional and financial well-being."

"The university is confident that our policies comply with all applicable laws and regulations," Peart said in a statement.

The court filing described accounts from two current students, three former students, and Elis for Rachael — an alumni group founded in 2021 to help Yale students who are struggling with their mental health.

The students alleged in the lawsuit that the Yale administration urged them to voluntarily leave the university after they were admitted into the hospital for suicide attempts or other mental health problems. If students did not take voluntary time off, the university could

involuntarily withdraw them which “can come quickly and with little or no notice,” according to the lawsuit.

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“Yale’s withdrawal policy provides for involuntary withdrawals for disability-related symptoms, including threat to self. It does not provide any deference to treating professionals or consideration of whether withdrawal will cause harm,” the lawsuit states.

In the complaint, plaintiff Hannah Neves — who is a current undergraduate student in her fourth year — said she was hospitalized in 2020 after a suicide attempt and was pressured by three Yale administrators to withdraw but said she did not want to withdraw.

During Neves’ hospitalization, university administrators withdrew her involuntarily, the lawsuit said. Following Neves’ discharge, she was required to have police escort her to collect her belongings and Neves was told by university officials that she could only say goodbye to her friends off campus since she was no longer allowed to be on university grounds, according to the lawsuit.

When she was discharged from the hospital, she saw an email stating that she had been involuntarily withdrawn from Yale and had 72 hours to leave the campus. According to the lawsuit, Yale’s policies require students on withdrawal to move out of their campus housing within 48 hours.

Former student Nicolette Mantica also underwent the same process after being withdrawn involuntarily, according to the lawsuit.

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The lawsuit further alleged that Yale’s withdrawal policies have put a burden on students “from less privileged backgrounds.”

Peart said the university in recent years has simplified the process for students on medical withdrawals to return to Yale, in addition to providing more support and increasing resources for students.

While the university has taken measures to improve its policies and resources, Rishi Mirchandani, co-founder of Elis for Rachael and a 2019 Yale graduate, told USA TODAY that these measures are “simply not enough.”

According to Mirchandani, the reinstatement application process is “still a really daunting process, especially for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Students on withdrawal are often put in a financial emergency and those who have to apply for reinstatement lack institutional support, such as university health insurance and housing, Mirchandani said.

The university previously responded to a Washington Post article about student mental health and Yale’s withdrawal policies in a Nov. 16 letter. In the letter, President Peter Salovey said the Post article “does not reflect Yale’s efforts to foster student wellness.”

Salovey added that the university had dropped the requirement of needing to take two courses at another school before seeking 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," Salovey said in the letter.

Monica Porter, an attorney with the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law working with the plaintiffs, told USA TODAY that the plaintiffs hope to bring the university “to the table to finally resolve these issues for the benefit of Yale students moving forward.”

By seeking certification to be a class action, the lawsuit represents more than 1,300 current students as well as alumni.

*Contributing: The Associated Press*

