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# Lawsuit claims Yale doesn't accommodate mental disabilities

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By CHRIS ROUSH

Yale University fails to accommodate students with mental health disabilities, according to a federal lawsuit filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Connecticut.

The 41-page lawsuit alleges that Yale “discriminates against students with mental health disabilities in a variety of ways.” The plaintiffs are two Yale students and the mental health advocacy group Elis for Rachael.

Yale’s policies and their effect on students with mental health needs were the subject of [a story in The Washington Post](#) that described a university “beset by inadequate services and



policies that often fail students in crisis." The story detailed student suicides and suicide attempts.

Yale Interim Vice President of Communications Karen Peart [told the Yale Daily News](#) that the University is "confident" its policies comply with applicable laws and regulations. Peart added that University leaders have been working on policy changes that are "responsive to students' emotional and financial wellbeing" and are working to increase supportive resources.

The plaintiffs are seeking injunctive relief that would end Yale's practices. Monetary damages are not being sought.



Elis for Rachael was formed after Yale student Rachael Shaw-Rosenbaum died by suicide on campus in March 2021. The organization includes Yale alumni, family, and friends and



provides emotional support, mentorship, and financial support to current students with mental health needs

Elis for Rachael recently earned nonprofit status. Its leadership includes Yale alumni with mental health disabilities.

"We are proud to stand with current students to fight to end Yale's discriminatory policies," said Elis for Rachael member Lily Dorman Colby, a Yale alumnus, in a statement. "Students don't feel heard. They don't feel like they can share what's really happening to them. And ultimately inflexible policies lead to students not getting what they need when they need it."

The lawsuit states that Yale's withdrawal policies and practices push students with mental health disabilities out of the university and impose punitive consequences on students who have withdrawn.

The impact of Yale's discriminatory policies is harshest on students with mental health disabilities from less privileged backgrounds, including students of color, students from poor families or rural areas, and international students, the lawsuit claims.

The class that the plaintiffs seek to represent is "composed of all Yale students who have, or have a record of, mental health disabilities and who are being harmed, or reasonably fear being harmed, by the illegal policies and practices challenged in this lawsuit."

"We hope that this lawsuit brings about essential changes in Yale's long-standing policies and practices to ensure that students with mental health disabilities receive the accommodations that they need in order to have an equal educational opportunity," said Deborah A. Dorfman, executive director of Disability Rights Connecticut and an attorney, in a statement.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of the plaintiffs by Disability Rights Connecticut, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, and the Vladeck, Raskin & Clark law firm.

**Chris Roush is editor in chief of Ability Media, a project of the Quinnipiac University School of Communications.**

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