



Princeton University student alleges discrimination following attempted suicide in dorm room, officials said

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PRINCETON — An unnamed student at Princeton University was allegedly evicted from his freshman dorm, asked to withdraw from classes and banned from campus in February 2012 following a suicide attempt on school grounds, **according to a July 2012 discrimination complaint** filed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

Though he was not forced to withdraw, university officials allegedly said if he did not withdraw "voluntarily," he would have to leave once he missed about three weeks of classes, with no refunds, said Lewis Bossing, senior attorney at Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, the firm representing the student.

"He was coerced. Basically the university gave him no choice and said he was going to have to leave one way or another," Bossing said.

The student, now 20 years old, ultimately left Princeton for two semesters to secure a partial refund of his tuition, room and board and "to make it less of an issue for his record," Bossing said. He returned in fall 2013 as a sophomore and is currently enrolled at the university, Bossing said.

The complaint was initially dismissed in January 2013 by the OCR, though the student's lawyer, Julia Graff of the Bazelon Center, is appealing the decision on his behalf, university spokesman Martin Mbugua said Wednesday.



File photo: A student walks outside Princeton University's Firestone Library on Jan. 22, 2014.

Martin Griff / The Times of Trenton

"The OCR dismissed each of the student's claims and neither criticized nor questioned the judgments made or actions taken by the university," Mbugua said. "The OCR has since reopened one question related to conditions imposed upon a student returning after a withdrawal, and that issue is pending."

Mbugua declined to comment further on the issue.

The student alleged Princeton discriminated against him on the basis of his mental disability, namely Type II bipolar disorder, and violated Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Bossing said.

"They treated our client differently than they would have with other students seeking readmission," he said. "They imposed more onerous conditions that he had to satisfy in order to be readmitted."

Before the student could be readmitted, Princeton required him to submit documentation that he consistently engaged in treatment during his time away and that he had an "extended period of psychological and behavioral stability," Bossing said.

But Princeton also required his outside clinicians to discuss his progress with the university's Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) clinicians, who, according to Bossing, shared information with administrative staff, he said.

On Feb. 25, 2012, the student, then 18 years old, attempted suicide in his Princeton dorm by ingesting 20 pills used to treat depression, and immediately tried vomiting, Bossing said.

The student sought help from CPS following the incident and also outside providers.

On Feb. 29, the student and his mother attended a "family meeting" with university officials in which the student said he wanted to immediately return to Princeton while pursuing outpatient treatment, Bossing said.

University officials said they believed the student posed a direct threat to himself and was strongly encouraged to "voluntarily" withdraw, that such a withdrawal was "always the outcome in these cases" and the student would have to show six to nine months of "demonstrated stability" to return, the complaint said.

The student offered to pursue a part-time academic schedule while living off-campus or take a single-semester leave of absence rather than the two Princeton insisted, both of which the university refused, the complaint alleges.

Princeton told the student it did not permit leaves of absence of less than a year "in cases like this," the complaint said.

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