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EDUCATION

Students at now-closed Connecticut nursing school sue state officials, say they've made things worse

BY SUSAN HAIGH

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Students at a for-profit nursing school in Connecticut that abruptly closed in February filed a federal class-action lawsuit against state officials on Tuesday, arguing their actions and defamatory statements have prevented the students from moving on with their training and careers.

“They’re literally stuck,” said attorney David A. Slossberg, who is part of a team of lawyers representing what could potentially be more than 1,200 former Stone Academy students.

The lawsuit, which focuses on the state’s conduct after the school’s closure, argues the students’ constitutional rights have been violated because they have been deprived of property rights to earned academic credits. After the school’s three campuses were shuttered, a state audit declared thousands of credit hours retroactively invalid, something Slossberg argues officials did not have the authority to do.

“You really have state agencies who weren’t authorized to behave this way, who really went rogue in many respects,” he said. “And instead of making things better, they multiplied the harm to these hard-working students exponentially.”

The plaintiffs also argue they have been deprived of their “liberty rights to their good name, reputation, honor, and integrity” by state officials. The students claim they have been “stigmatized” and unable to transfer any credits, audited or

otherwise, to other Connecticut nursing schools because they are now seen as “ill prepared to practice as practical nurses.”

“Unfortunately, all the people in positions of trust failed these students,” said Slossberg, who is working with attorneys Kristen L. Zaehring, Erica O. Nolan and Timothy C. Cowan on the case. The lawsuit names the commissioners of the Connecticut Office of Higher Education and Connecticut Department of Public Health, as well as two other state officials, as defendants in the case.

It follows an earlier lawsuit filed by the students in May against Stone Academy’s parent company, the academy’s part-owner and other people. Earlier this month, a judge decided at least \$5 million must be set aside for the students.

In July, the state of Connecticut [also sued](#) the for-profit nursing school, accusing it of aggressively using marketing to recruit students, many of them Black and Hispanic women who took out loans and used their life savings to pay the more than \$30,000 in tuition and other costs to become licensed practical nurses. But Attorney General William Tong said the school provided an inadequate education and left them ineligible to take licensing exams and obtain state nursing licenses.

Tong has also claimed nearly \$1 million year was funneled from Stone Academy to subsidize another school, to the detriment of Stone Academy students.

The state’s lawsuit seeks millions of dollars in restitution for the students and penalties for alleged violations of the state’s unfair trade practices laws. Stone Academy, in a statement, has called the state’s lawsuit baseless and blamed other state agencies for forcing the school to close.

Asked about the lawsuit filed by the students against state officials on Tuesday, Tong’s office said in a statement: “While we are reviewing this lawsuit, we will continue to hold Stone and its owners accountable for their greedy, self-serving decisions which cost Stone’s students years of time and money.”