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Stone Academy students sue Connecticut officials for canceling their school credits

By [Justin McGown](#)

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Stone Academy, a for-profit nursing school with campuses in East Hartford, Waterbury and West Haven, abruptly closed last February after more than 150 years in operation amid concerns regarding low licensing pass rates for its students, unqualified instructors and compliance problems involving state and federal agencies and a school accreditation organization. In July, the Stone Academy owners were charged under the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices by Attorney General William Tong with siphoning millions of dollars from the school directly into their own pockets.



In August, a class action suit filed by 1,000 former nursing students against the owners received a pre-trial remedy of \$5 million. On Dec. 26, the law firm of Hurwitz, Sagarin, Slossberg, & Knuff LLC followed up with an additional class action lawsuit naming many of the state officials who carried out the audit as defendants.

“All of the persons who were in positions of trust for these thousand plus nursing students failed them,” said David Slossberg, a principal of the firm. “The case that we filed today against the state seeks to hold the state responsible for their part. In particular, this action focusses on the state’s conduct following Stone Academy’s closure. Specifically, that it without authority retroactively declared earned academic credits invalid.”

The case named as plaintiffs the state officials of the organizations involved in the audit, including Timothy Larson, the commissioner of the Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE), and Division Director of Academic Affairs Sean Seepersad. Also named are Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) Commissioner Manisha Juthani and Section Chief for Practitioner Licensing and Investigations Chris Andresen.

Slossberg, who stressed the suit was the combined work of Kristen L. Zaehring, Erica O. Nolan and Timothy C. Cowan, noted that the timing of the suits was simply the result of how filing the claims played out.



David Slossberg

Slossberg also drew attention to the students who passed the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). The test, which registered and practical nurses must pass to receive their licenses, had been completed by a number of students, but Slossberg stated the DPH violated their rights by delaying issuance of those licenses despite it being obligatory. The lawsuit also argued that the DPH violated the rights of the plaintiffs by imposing an obligation to take refresher courses.

“Defendants not only exceeded their authority by retroactively invalidating earned and awarded credits,” the complaint said, “but also contradicted their mandatory obligations to accept the credits and degrees awarded by an authorized private nursing program, and to issue licenses to students who passed the NCLEX licensing exam.”

“The test is there for a reason,” Slossberg asserted. “You don’t go back and say your credits are invalid. You allow people to finish the program, they sit for the exam, if they pass it, they’re qualified. If they don’t pass it, they can go take a refresher course and take the exam again.”

However, Stone Academy students were required to take refresher courses even after having passed the exam and signed an agreement to do so. Slossberg said that around

50 students refused to sign the agreement and that the state opened an investigation into them in retaliation.

A response to the lawsuit has not been filed with the courts at the time of writing, though filings have been delayed by the holiday.

“The Office of Higher Education denies the allegations and will defend its actions in court,” said an email from the OHE. Division Director Seepersad declined to comment.

The DPH also declined to comment about the lawsuit, while the department’s Chris Andresen could not be reached before publication.