

New York University gives students 36 hours' notice to leave dormitories, leaving many students facing homelessness

Sam Dalton
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The World Socialist Web Site encourages all students and youth who want to tell their stories to contact us today, and to take up the fight for socialism by joining the IYSSE, (International Youth and Students for Social Equality), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party.

At 3:26 p.m. on Tuesday, New York University (NYU) students received an email from the university's administration asking students in university accommodation to vacate their dormitories within 36 hours. The announcement came just 24 hours after an email was sent asking students to leave by March 22. Similar sudden student evictions notices are being issued at campuses across the country, leaving thousands of young people without secure housing as the COVID-19 crisis intensifies.

NYU also sent out an email Tuesday stating that graduate students in subsidized housing would be evicted, only to backtrack on the threat in another email minutes later. About 12,000 undergraduate and graduate students live in NYU residence halls.

The university anticipates having to turn the dormitories into hospital facilities as the coronavirus continues to spread and cases are confirmed throughout New York City and the broader region. New York state is now at the center of the outbreak in the US, with 2,382 confirmed cases as of this writing, most of which are in New York City.

There is no doubt that school closures are a necessary and prudent measure from an epidemiological standpoint. However, the haphazard and negligent manner in which the housing evacuations have taken place is another stark indication of the complete lack of preparedness within the political establishment for the unfolding public health crisis.

These evictions place thousands of students in a dire situation with many, especially international students and those from working class families, facing the immediate prospect of homelessness.

NYU has arranged for only the most vulnerable students to apply for exemptions to the housing eviction. They stated in

their notice that the exemption bar will be "very high." Overall, the measures taken by NYU, a school with a \$4.35 billion endowment, to secure housing or financial aid for those in need has been incredibly limited.

In the face of the forced evictions, NYU students independently began organizing to help those students not covered by the university. They started an online shared document where students could explain their situations and ask for help from the broader community. The document was circulated to some students and faculty and posted on social media. One student described his situation: "I'm from Iran, I do not have a place to stay in NY, I cannot go home because of the travel bans and Visa and my home is already affected really badly by COVID-19."

Another student stated, "I'm Italian and can't go home." Italy has been one of the countries hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic, with more than 35,000 infections and 3,000 deaths so far.

One student wrote: "My mother is facing losing her job and she is the only family I have, if she cannot provide for me during this I will have no source of income. I was working an on-campus job and going to transition right into Summer housing and then Fall housing. I have no home outside of housing and the University's decision to force everyone out will immensely affect me and my mother financially."

Approximately 20 percent of NYU students receive Pell grants, a federal aid program for students from families with total incomes below \$50,000 a year. Many of these students will not be able to afford the cost of alternative housing or of returning home. Students who come from unsafe households face a choice between homelessness or abuse.

Moreover, many of the students affected in this crisis are currently away from their student housing and unable to return to New York to collect their belongings. In violation of guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NYU has instructed students within a

day's travel of the school to return to collect their belongings, encouraging exposure and potential transmission among hundreds of students.

International students, who make up 27 percent of students in NYU housing, are being expelled from their accommodation despite many not having a place to go. Flight restrictions adopted by a number of countries mean those who wish to return home often cannot, and, even if they can, travel restrictions imposed by the US could mean they are not able to return. Furthermore, graduating international students are legally required to stay in the US while their visas are processed.

One senior noted that she lost her housing due to NYU's decision after already losing both of her part-time jobs, adding: "I come from a low-income single parent household. I'm on Pell grant. My mom's husband is very sick and because I am in NYC I can't come home due to his underlying sicknesses."

Latisha, a student at NYU who has been evicted, told the WWS, "... NYU as a whole mismanaged this whole situation. I'm pretty sure they knew or had an inkling that COVID-19 was going to spread, ergo possibly knowing that the dorms would be needed for shelter, etc. They should have been more transparent and honest as an institution with the student body."

University administrators have failed to give a time frame for a reimbursement of prepaid student housing. It is likely that even as the crisis deepens and students are increasingly preoccupied with the loss of loved ones or the burden of care NYU will continue its class schedule in order to avoid reimbursement of tuition. Like many universities around the country and the world, NYU is shifting to online classes until the end of the semester.

NYU has given the most vulnerable students the option to apply for exemptions from the order, but stated that the "bar will be very high." NYU gave students the option of making emergency financial expense claims limited to \$500; for many students this is not enough for a ticket home, let alone to find new accommodation. NYU is only guaranteeing sick pay and continuing wages for graduate students who work as teaching assistants.

However, undergraduate workers, many of whom rely on that income for food and accommodation, have been laid off indefinitely without compensation.

The precarious situation facing students because of the evictions has led to an outpouring of support from fellow NYU students and parts of the faculty. A change.org petition calling for the evictions to be halted has reached over 7,000 signatures in just over 48 hours, and an online forum allowing students to donate and offer beds to those in need has also been set up.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at NYU categorically opposes NYU's evictions without alternative housing already arranged. We demand a full reimbursement of housing for students and protections for international and domestic students.

We insist that the right to safe housing must be guaranteed for all students and workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This demand must be part of a coordinated response by the international working class to the pandemic on the political basis outlined by the Socialist Equality Party.

Everywhere, the working population and youth are being made to pay for the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. While millions of workers face immediate economic destitution, the loss of their jobs, and a serious threat to their health and lives, the Trump administration has pumped \$2.2 trillion into the stock market and handed over all authority for dealing with this public health emergency to private corporations.

As one of the most expensive universities in the country, NYU reflects the staggering levels of social inequality that dominate American society. The university's president, Andrew Hamilton, was reported in 2018 to have had an estimated pay of \$2 million, placing him among the top 10 of the highest-compensated university presidents. The NYU Board of Trustees is dominated by billionaires and millionaires, most of whom have close ties to the Democratic Party, the Trump administration and the military-intelligence apparatus.

At the same time, nearly 10 percent of the undergraduate student body utilized the Courtesy Meals Program for food insecure students in the spring of 2019.



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