A twenty-year-old student dies from COVID-19 at California University of Pennsylvania

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The Coronavirus continues to spread throughout the public colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania State University has seen a spike in cases and at least one student has died of complications from COVID-19 at California University of Pennsylvania.

This past week another 306 students tested positive for COVID-19 at the main campus of Pennsylvania State University. This brings the total number of confirmed cases to over 1,371 since the school reopened late last month.

Centre County, where the school is located, now has one of the fastest-growing number of new cases in Pennsylvania.

California University of Pennsylvania student Jamain Stephens Jr. died September 9 from a blood clot in his heart after he contracted COVID-19. He was 20 years old.

About a week before his death, Jamain told friends that he tested positive for COVID-19. He played football for California University as a defensive lineman. The Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference voted in July to suspend all fall sports in 2020.

His mother, Kelly Allen, told CBS News that she was worried about football players and other athletes who were playing sports this fall in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I'm very, very nervous for these young men and women … These kids, their lives are priceless. And it's just not worth it. It's not worth it," she said.

Allen said that Jamain was the light of her life.

"Just an infectious personality, an infectious smile, and just a good guy to his core," she told CBS. Stephens was the son of Pittsburgh Steelers Jamain Stephens who also was a defensive lineman.

The death of Stephens marks another tragic example that the premature reopening of schools and universities is having a deadly impact on students, faculty, and staff.

Pennsylvania's Democratic Governor Tom Wolf pushed for the reopening of the public universities and schools this fall as part of the drive to open businesses in Pennsylvania despite the continued spread of the pandemic.

Pennsylvania has over 155,408 confirmed cases and 8,067 deaths, and the numbers are rising. On Saturday, there were 1,162 new cases, making it the fifth day this month to have more than one thousand new cases compared with August when there were not any days that topped one thousand.

The weekly average is also increasing. The number of daily new cases for the first two weeks of September was 794 cases per day for the week of September 2-8 and 836 new cases per day for the week of September 9-15. This is higher than any week in August. As the cooler weather sets in, health experts fear a resurgence of the virus along with the flu.

Pennsylvania has a patchwork of public supported universities and colleges. California University is part of the state system of higher education, which has a total of 14 universities throughout Pennsylvania. Penn State University (PSU) is one of four state-supported universities, along with the University of Pittsburgh, Temple, and Lincoln. PSU is one of the most expensive public universities in the country.

"What we see is a disregard for human lives," said a Shippensburg University Professor who asked to remain anonymous. "The level of disregard for human lives of teachers, faculty, staff and students is

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outrageous.

"The administration is showing that they don't care about their lives. That they are disposable not just as workers but as human beings.

"I've spoken with a lot of teachers and they have told me that they are not being given the protective equipment that they need to be safe. I've had teachers tell me that the PPE is a bucket and an empty spray bottle.

"For others it is one mask, a bucket and something we call 'blue spray.' Nobody is sure what this is. Or if it is effective or not. Maybe a teacher is allergic to it, nobody knows for sure; it looks like Windex.

"It is very hard to teach. I do all online learning, you have 24 maybe 25 students in a little window. Other teachers tell me only 4 or 5 students are showing up for their classes and they have to teach both online and in-person at the same time.

"I have a lot of questions about how the university is testing and reporting our numbers. We have 4 students who have tested positive and that number hasn't changed. Meanwhile, at PSU, WVU [West Virginia University in Morgantown], and Kutztown [another college in the Pennsylvania system] numbers are exploding.

"I don't feel safe going to campus, I know students are living four in a dorm. I see the kids driving through town grouped together. I don't blame them. They shouldn't be put in that situation. They shouldn't be asked to not behave like a 20-years-old, doing what is a natural part of life.

"The university put them in this position. We are just chasing the money because the public university is no longer viewed as a public good. Maybe it was never viewed as a public good.

"I think [Pennsylvania Governor Tom] Wolf started off with good ideas, but as soon as there is the least little push back he just gives in."

The Professor is also the father of four, including some who are still in school.

"I reached out to Wolf to try and find out how they were going to enforce social distancing. How they were going to keep the students and faculty safe. I contacted the Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], Department of Health and the Wolf administration.

"Wolf never got back to me. Only the PDE got back to me and they just said it was up to the different school districts.

"Silence has been the response of our union. The PSSU [Pennsylvania Social Services Union] tell us they are negotiating for us, but we are never informed and never asked. I've had colleagues whose requests were completely ignored by HR, and ignored by the union.

"I've had teachers tell me that when they went to their union, the PSEA [Pennsylvania State Education Association] and their local presidents have agreed with the administration and told them that 'they were just being lazy.'

"We need a huge reform. If I can save a few teachers from getting sick or dying, that is the best I can do right now."

The Socialist Equality Party is working to organize rank-and-file committees of teachers, faculty, staff and students to oppose the unsafe reopening of colleges and public education. To find out more, please sign up for the Educators newsletter and attend our public meeting on Saturday.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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