

# SJSU students blast university leaders for handling of housing crisis

Just six students received emergency housing on campus during the 2018-19 school year



More than 80 students reached out to San Jose State University for help with housing last school year, but a campus group says too few are getting the help they need.

The school said recently just six students received emergency on-campus housing during the 2018-2019 academic year, sparking outrage among community and student groups.

“We have been met with inaction and left without answers,” said Student Homeless Alliance member Ashley Crosdale at a press conference Wednesday morning.

San Jose State is not alone. From community colleges to UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley, and at [elementary schools](#) on the Peninsula, student homelessness is a problem. A [2017 survey](#) of Cal students found that 10 percent had experienced homelessness at some point since arriving at the school — a figure that jumped to a shocking 20 percent among post-doctoral students. In Santa Cruz, dozens of students [sleep in vans](#).

For a few weeks in 2017, Nanzi Muro slept in her car or wherever else she could find a place to bunk. When the San Jose State student told an adviser about her living situation, she received little help.

“I left the office without resources,” Muro recalled.

She ended up taking out a loan to pay for housing.

The Student Homeless Alliance says that situation is far too common.

The alliance wants emergency loans to be a last resort. Instead, they want the university to make more housing available to low-income students at subsidized rates, offer \$4,000 grants to students about to become homeless, and provide emergency beds for any homeless student, including those living in motels, Airbnbs or couch surfing.

The group met with university president Mary Papazian and vice president of student affairs Patrick Day in March to request access to parking lots at night for students sleeping in cars, among other things. The students said the university indicated in vague terms that it was focused on long-term, sustainable solutions.

But, they argued, the problem is pressing now. A [recent report](#) from the California State University system found that more than 4,000 SJSU students found themselves homeless at some point in the last year — about 13 percent of those enrolled.

“Short-term is a step to long-term,” said Elsa Salgado, the current Student Homeless Alliance president.

In a statement, the university said not all students who need emergency housing want to live on campus. The school created SJSU Cares as a one-stop shop where students experiencing homelessness — along with other issues like hunger, illness or addiction — can seek help.

“SJSU Cares begins services by assessing each student’s unique needs to understand the best approach toward sustainable housing and a comprehensive solution — rather than providing just ‘a bed,’” the school said.

In total, SJSU Cares got 189 requests for help last school year, including around 84 specifically related to housing. Of the 189, 53 students received financial aid grants with an average amount of around \$1,100, 21 students were offered loans, 18 students got emergency funds with an average amount of just under \$800, and six students got emergency housing on campus, staying an average of about 18 days.

Christine Hutchins, a spokeswoman for the university, told this news organization on Wednesday the school has the capability to provide an emergency bed for all students who ask for one. Hutchins said the school is talking to Mayor Sam Liccardo’s office about the issue and that the university will release a broader plan to help students struggling with homelessness, but did not provide specific details.

But Student Homeless Alliance members said too many students feel pressured to take out loans or turn to outside organizations like the Bill Wilson Center.

Sparky Harlan, CEO of the Bill Wilson Center, said her organization does take referrals from the university and is working on establishing a closer relationship with the school.

“We’ve been serving homeless students since the beginning of our program,” Harlan, who herself struggled to find stable housing as a college student in San Francisco, said.

While some students fall into homelessness after entering college, many go into college with a history of housing instability. And as more residents of all ages struggle to afford the high cost of housing, more students do too.

“Students are up against that just like anybody else,” Harlan said.

“It’s disheartening to me,” said Pastor Scott Wagers, who attended the university and has been serving the homeless for years. “San Jose State has to do better.”

When Wagers was a student, he said, he worked with people living on the streets in the city, but homelessness wasn’t a visible issue among students then.

“When I was young, I didn’t think I’d see what I see now,” he said.

In late November, the Student Homeless Alliance will hold a conference for CSU, UC and community college students to discuss student homelessness and statewide solutions.

Rev. Jethroe Moore of the NAACP encouraged students to launch a campus-wide protest if they want to see real action from the university, and urged local churches to house students.

“I’m here for you,” Moore said. “We’re going to do all we can.”

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