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# Students demand San Jose State fix homelessness response, provide emergency shelter

Interim President Stephen Perez: “We can do better”



SAN JOSE, CA – April 20: San Jose State University students including a senior, Samantha Shinagawa, center, chant while marching on campus on April 20, 2022, in San Jose, Calif. A group of SJSU students urged the university to fix its



By **KAYLA JIMENEZ** | Bay Area News Group

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SAN JOSE — Student advocates are calling on San Jose State University leaders to make good on their promise to provide resources for students who are sleeping in cars, couches, the campus library and even the streets because they can't afford housing in one of the country's most-expensive housing markets.

The group is demanding more transparency from university officials, two years after San Jose State agreed to provide emergency funds and a shelter to students struggling with homelessness.

On Wednesday, weeks away from the end of the spring semester, nearly 30 students from San Jose State University's Student Homeless Alliance held a protest to collectively call on Interim President Stephen Perez and Vice President Patrick Day to fix its response to student homelessness for the fall, and share more information about the university's previous commitment under former president Mary Papazian to help students.

“We've been calling press conferences since last October. We've been doing marches,” Samantha Shinagawa, a senior at the university, said. “And the administration still has been neglecting the agreement we agreed upon two years ago at this point.”

Shinagawa and her peers want administrators to create a clear written policy notifying students they can receive up to four weeks of housing assistance without having to take out loans, and share the results of student exit interviews from a university-run program called SJSU Cares to gauge its success, among other concerns.

In a 2021 report, SJSU Cares reported that 11.2% of the SJSU student body surveyed had experienced homelessness at least once within the year.



In the second half of last year, 213 students contacted the university's SJSU Cares program "with some type of housing concern," a report from the university shows. Of those students, 23 received housing through a local non-profit called the Bill Wilson Center, 12 received emergency housing, 42 received a grant that allowed them to retain housing at an average \$1,069; 96 received financial aid, housing referral or assistance with leases, and 40 "did not keep appointments" or were "discontinued."



SAN JOSE, CA – April 20: Briana Brown, former president of San Jose State University's Student Homeless Alliance holds a sign that reads "4000 SPARTANS HOMELESS IN 2021" during a rally on campus on April 20, 2022, in San Jose, Calif. A group of SJSU students urged the university to fix its homelessness response and provide emergency shelter to students who need it in the fall. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)

In 2020, university administration signed an agreement with the students to cope with the student housing crisis, but the students "strongly believe that SJSU has not fully implemented the agreement."

Robin McElhatton, a spokeswoman for the university, said officials are in communication with students who need housing resources, and that SJSU Cares has launched awareness campaigns since November 2021 to spread the word.

"If a student needs emergency housing, we will work to get a roof over their



The students from the Student Homeless Alliance also are upset that Associated Students, a non-profit student organization, is paying for the 12-bed emergency housing program, “despite only one bed’s use being confirmed” and no transparency to determine the success of the program.

The university contends that Associated Students offered \$100,000 to fund the first semester of emergency beds, dining vouchers, welcome kits and other resources for students who used the beds, and it’s not an inappropriate allocation of funds.



SAN JOSE, CA – April 20: San Jose State University graduate student Anthony Contreras holds a sign during a rally on campus on April 20, 2022, in San Jose, Calif. A group of SJSU students urged the university to fix its homelessness response and provide emergency shelter to students who need it in the fall. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)

Interim President Perez plans to meet with the group to address their concerns on Thursday. He contends the university has addressed “a number” of the issues raised by student advocates.

“But we can do better,” Perez said. Moving forward, his plan is to figure out why students are facing homelessness and “to pull together a group of stakeholders and talk about ‘How can we do this best?’” to implement strategies that work for the university and students.



“I think that’s the key,” Perez said. At the same time, Perez said the university will gauge its success by how many of its students are unhoused “and looking for a place to sleep,” and could use additional funding as a buffer to help students struggling with homelessness in the large urban area of San Jose.

Anthony Majano, president of Student Homeless Alliance and a junior at the university, said he hopes the conversation with the university allows his group and campus officials to move forward and help homeless students often “hidden in plain sight.”

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Kayla Jimenez covers schools and education with a regional focus for The Mercury News and East Bay Times. Prior to that, she developed a penchant for investigations and devotion to schools reporting at Voice of San Diego, where she worked on an award-winning series of stories about sexual abuse in K-12 schools in San Diego County, and as a college journalist at San Diego State University. She grew up in the South Bay and graduated from Yerba Buena High School.

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