

Rutgers says male, female students can share room

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(AP) -- New Jersey's flagship state university has decided to allow male and female students to share rooms in three dorms in an effort to make the Rutgers' New Brunswick campus more inclusive for gay students after a highly publicized suicide last year.

Starting this fall, all students - whether gay, lesbian, transgender or heterosexual - can choose either male or female roommates under the pilot program. Men and women will share bathrooms.

A similar, but smaller, pilot program is being launched at the Newark campus.

A number of other schools, including the University of Maryland, New York's Columbia University and Washington's George Washington University, offer similar housing options, according to the National Student Genderblind Campaign.

The organization is pressing for more programs like them, saying they're a way for students to have roommates they're comfortable with.

Rutgers got wide attention last year after freshman Tyler Clementi killed himself by jumping off the George Washington Bridge into the Hudson River. Authorities say that days before, his roommate in a dorm used a webcam to capture Clementi during an intimate encounter with another man.

The roommate and a third freshman have been charged with invasion of privacy in the case. Their lawyers say they're not guilty of any crimes.

Gay student groups have pushed for the gender-neutral housing policy for years.

But it got more attention after Clementi's death when there was increased scrutiny of the way gay, lesbian and transgender students are sometimes treated on campus.

Aaron Lee, a senior from Blairstown, N.J., said he would have taken advantage of the policy if it had been offered before now.

"I'm very excited about the ability for students to room with people of the opposite legal sex," said Lee, who said he's a female-to-male transgendered person. "Someone's legal sex may be different from the sex they appear to people."

Lee said that while some of the attention is focused on the fact that opposite-sex couples can now live together, that's not the main intent of the housing policy. After all, he said, gay couples have always been allowed to live in dorm rooms together.

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