

Hello,

My name is Alyssa Shermer and I'm a University of Maryland alumni. I am just one of the many students negatively impacted by the actions of South Campus Commons and MEDCO.

On February 13th, 2020, I signed a year-long contract with South Campus Commons for the academic year 2020-2021. Just a month later on March 12th, the University of Maryland closed its campus and canceled classes because of the global health emergency, Covid-19. We, the students, hoped and assumed that we would be back on campus for our next fall semester. However, due to pandemic, on July 15th, 2020, the University of Maryland announced our classes would be online. On July 16th, I reached out to the leasing office at South Campus Commons to dissolve my lease. I was told that this wasn't an option for me. Unlike the students who stayed in the dorms, who were able to dissolve their contracts, my only option was to find a sublease to take over my lease. With 80% of classes being held online and a raging pandemic, I was unable to find a student willing to take over my lease.

On July 17th, I created a petition to urge the University and Medco to release its students. I was able to connect with over one hundred students who were facing the same problem as I was. We decided as a group to obtain a lawyer to help us, we hoped it would be resolved quickly but it was not. We banded together for months, protesting and begging for someone to help us. We reached out to everyone, local and state government officials, University of Maryland staff, and MEDCO officials. Government officials were either too busy or had no power to help us. University of Maryland declared that they had no affiliation with the MEDCO company and that it was not up to them if the students were released. Many students were under the impression that the South Campus Commons was a part of the University's campus as the buildings reside on university property.

We went on a rent strike at our lawyer's request. Months went by with more protesting both in-person and online. Finally, they agreed to let us out for the fall semester but not for the spring semester.

We heard nothing more for months and our phone calls and emails were ignored by University of Maryland and MEDCO. Eventually, the MEDCO lawyer told our lawyer that they would not come after us for the unpaid rent. The MEDCO lawyer said if they changed their minds, they would inform our lawyer. Now we are in limbo waiting to see if they truly let us out of our leases or if they will come after us within before the statute of limitations expires.

I hope that this bill will be passed to help future students in Maryland. No one should be forced to endure the financial stress of a housing lease for housing that cannot be used during a global health emergency. This bill will help students to be treated equally on campus in the event of another health emergency. I urge the State to pass this bill for the safety and wellbeing of its citizens.

Thank you,
Alyssa Shermer