

“We need more people in society to stand against these ‘leaders’ and speak the truth.”

Workers across the US speak out in defense of COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones

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On Monday, Florida state police forcefully entered the home of Rebekah Jones with guns drawn at her and her family. Jones is a data scientist and whistleblower who has faced backlash from the political establishment for aggregating and publishing data on the spread of COVID-19 throughout the country, including The COVID Monitor, the most comprehensive tracker of outbreaks in schools. Police took Jones' phone, computer and several hard drives in an effort to prevent her from continuing to publish data on COVID-19 outbreaks.

Video footage of the fascistic police raid has gone viral on social media and has been met with mass outrage by the public. Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis, loathed by workers across the state for his criminal response to the pandemic and indifference to the suffering of masses, has been widely denounced for orchestrating the raid against Jones.

During a mental health roundtable in Tampa, Florida yesterday, a news reporter asked DeSantis if he “knew about the Rebekah Jones raid before it happened.” DeSantis fumed at this characterization, shouting, “It's not a raid! I'm not gonna let you get away with it. These people did their jobs. They've been smeared as the Gestapo for doing their jobs.”

DeSantis and Florida police have sought to justify the raid by claiming that Jones was responsible for sending an email to 1,700 Department of Health employees urging them to speak out and try to prevent future deaths. Jones denies being responsible for this email. It came to light this week that the username and password used was publicly available, meaning that anyone could have sent the email.

In reality, the attacks on Jones coincide with the major bipartisan campaign to reopen the schools, of which she has been an outspoken critic. It also coincides with a massive surge of the pandemic across Tallahassee, Florida, and throughout the US. It is clear that Republican and Democratic officials alike will seek to censor any genuine reporting on the catastrophic rise in cases ripping through communities in the US.

The Socialist Equality Party issued a statement Thursday in defense of Jones, noting:

The only social force capable of defending basic democratic rights, and whose objective interests demand full transparency on COVID-19 cases, is the international working class.

The SEP calls on all workers and youth to oppose the assault on Jones and all whistleblowers, and to fight for a comprehensive plan to contain the pandemic.

The SEP has been circulating this statement widely and has received statements of support for Jones from educators and other workers across the US.

Anthony, a Tallahassee, Florida, resident and data analyst, said, “Rebekah Jones' work is invaluable. Her dedication to accurate, transparent data collection and analysis is the only reason Florida residents have access to any meaningful data on the current conditions of COVID-19 in our communities, workplaces, and our schools.

“Reopening K-12 schools during the height of a pandemic was and continues to be a disastrous decision. Any unbiased observer can see this has crippled our state, eroded education and placed a tremendous amount of strain and trauma on parents, teachers, school staff and, most importantly, our children.

“The state and individual school districts are engaged in an active coverup of the true nature of the effects of their decision to reopen schools. With Rebekah's work and ethics we are at least provided a glimpse into reality.”

Michael, a teacher in Texas and admin of the Facebook group “Teachers Against Dying,” wrote the following to Jones:

The national educators' resistance group Teachers Against Dying, in conjunction with Rank-and-File Safety Committees across this country, thank you for your brave decision to speak truth to power.

The false narrative of the ruling elite that schools are safe and pose no threat to public health is, in part, contingent on suppressing data that reveals the truth. Namely, that conducting school in the midst of a raging pandemic is unsafe, homicidal, and perpetrated by a government who considers the short term economic outcomes of campaign donors ahead of working Americans.

Your work and your ordeal not only exposes relevant statistical data, but it sheds light on the motives of a corrupt government. Moreover, it contributes to a fight for life, mounted by thousands of educators dedicated to a profession that aims at instilling the character you have displayed in our students. Thank you.

The **Pennsylvania Educators Rank and File Safety Committee** issued this statement in defense of Jones:

The Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee condemns the government attack on COVID-19 whistleblower and scientist Rebekah Jones. Fired by Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis for refusing to doctor data on the State's coronavirus dashboard, Jones continued to publish the data on her own website and alert the population to the growing danger. For this courageous action, she and her children endured a brutal police raid, with guns pointed at them, and the seizure of her data.

The attack on Ms. Jones is a deliberate attempt to prevent the full extent of the pandemic from being known, so that the policy of herd immunity pursued by both Democrats and Republicans continues. It is meant to intimidate critical and outspoken scientists who warn against the dangers facing the working class. Finally, it is part of the growing violence by extreme right-wing forces being built up against workers. In Pennsylvania, Senator Kim Ward this week reported that the congressional delegation is under intense pressure by Trump to override the vote of the Commonwealth and make their own electoral college choices, noting, "If I would say to you, 'I don't want to do it,' I'd get my house bombed tonight." We urge all workers to defend Jones and all whistleblowers, while fighting for a comprehensive mobilization to fight the pandemic and save lives.

Elizabeth, a nurse from Lakewood, California, told the WWS, "We saw this with Julian Assange and Edward Snowden. Our government silences whistleblowers. I even saw it happening at the job I worked at, in the hospital. Corporations do it to their own employees. They say, 'You can't show us in a bad light.'"

"I don't agree with it. I think people have to start speaking up. They have to start standing up. Look at what's happening to Assange and it's been going on for years.

"I have a lot of anger and frustration inside of me, seeing people suffer. It's scary. Long Beach Memorial Hospital's COVID-19 patients have increased, especially in ICU, and more people are on ventilators. I think they even have a few pediatric patients with that inflammatory syndrome. One child died yesterday at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles."

Adriana, a college student at San Diego State University said, "It is an honor to state my defense of Rebekah Jones. I am completely appalled by the way in which she has been treated and how guns were held to her and her children after the outcry against police brutality. She is being treated like Edward Snowden and Julian Assange, who revealed the truth to the public. Her story was in the media for a second and now nothing is being said about her in major sources.

"The work Jones is doing is bringing science and the truth to the public which is hidden by government officials. I know many students who have to keep working in this pandemic and risking their lives, nothing is being done to stop it. In the Declaration of Independence we gave ourselves the right to overturn a government that no longer serves the people and this is what we face today."

Angela, a teacher in Winkelman, Arizona, spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* in defense of Rebekah Jones. Angela has first-hand experience contracting COVID-19 in the classroom, which the WWS previously discussed with her in August.

Angela said, "We need more people in society to stand against these 'leaders' and speak the truth. Any attempts by Florida officials to cover up data on COVID-19 is wrong. Jones should be able to speak her thoughts without her first amendment rights being revoked. The politicians have made COVID-19 political and not humanitarian."

Another **Arizona teacher** who wished to remain anonymous stated, "We should not have to live in fear of our government for speaking and reporting the truth. It would be reckless and devastating for Biden to open

schools in January. Look where we are two weeks out from Thanksgiving, and we are heading into the winter holidays.

"I appreciate the data that has been exposed by Jones. People's lives are at risk. I believe that opening schools has impacted the amount of COVID-19 case increases. I think our government needs to focus instead on funding schools so they can be remote, funding families so they do not have to work."

Liz, a teacher in Hawaii, stated, "This is further proof that the state of Florida is intentionally suppressing data in order to maintain the lie that in person school is safe. What this shows is the state's utter disregard for human life.

"The data exposed by Jones shows that schools are completely unsafe. If data supported the claim that in-person learning is safe, we wouldn't be hearing about public health scientists having their laptops taken by armed police officers for exposing the truth."

A teacher from the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee also spoke out in defense of Rebekah Jones, stating, "I believe that our committee should defend her. She is the epitome of what we are working towards. She is a worker who is unafraid to go up against the establishment when they told her to do something that was wrong."

She added, "This is why we set up our committee. It is important that injustices such as this should be exposed, and we fight against them. They are all important to our cause. Letting one injustice go unaccounted for is the weakening of the working class.

"The whole question of the attack on Rebekah Jones is that workers in general feel the need for protection from government entities and corporations that are targeting them for speaking out. She is incredibly brave. I look at her picture and think of how young she is. I would like to think that if placed in that situation at that age I would've done the same."

We call on our readers to send statements of support for Rebekah Jones to the WWS Educators Newsletter, which will compile and publish these statements to share with the global working class. We are assisting educators, parents, students and the entire working class in forming rank-and-file safety committees to fight to close schools and nonessential business in order to stop the spread of the pandemic. All those who wish to get involved should sign up today at wsws.org/edsafety.



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