

Texas educators call for united struggle in defense of whistleblower Rebekah Jones

Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
18 December 2020

This statement calls for the unity of educators in Florida, Texas and across the US in defense of COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones. It outlines the necessary program to close schools and nonessential workplaces, in order to stop the spread of the pandemic and save lives. We urge all those who want to join this struggle to send us your contact information today.

We, the Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, condemn the fascistic police raid on the home of COVID-19 whistleblower and data scientist Rebekah Jones that took place last week in Florida.

In true authoritarian fashion, agents aimed their guns at Jones, her husband and their children. They proceeded to seize her phone, computer and storage drives in an effort to intimidate her and any others reporting data on COVID-19 infections and deaths.

This assault on the democratic rights to free speech and freedom of information is part of a broader cover-up scheme to conceal the catastrophic spread of the pandemic in the name of corporate profit.

While the immediate aim in attacking Jones is to silence her and victimize any of her former coworkers at the Florida Department of Health (DOH) that she was in contact with, it is part of a broader effort to suppress all dissent from the working class to the homicidal policies of opening schools and nonessential businesses, the two primary vectors for the spread of COVID-19 this fall. This is exposed by the refusal to denounce the raid as an attack on democratic rights by Democrats and the smear by the Democratic-aligned *New York Times* against Jones.

Through her work with The COVID Monitor, the most comprehensive tracker of COVID-19 infections in K-12 schools in the US, Jones has documented 375,806 COVID-19 cases tied to the opening of K-12 schools. In the past 10 days alone, the tracker has logged an additional 117,344 total cases among students and school staff, exposing the lie peddled by the unions and politicians from both big-business parties that there can be a “safe reopening” of schools.

This latest effort to suppress data on COVID-19 follows Jones’ firing from the DOH in May for refusing to manipulate data on the spread of the pandemic, as demanded by Florida’s Republican Governor Ron DeSantis. In these efforts, DeSantis was aping the Trump administration, whose officials actively worked to manipulate the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

On Thursday, it was revealed that Paul Alexander, an adviser to

former Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) assistant secretary for public affairs Michael Caputo, sent numerous emails over the summer urging the DHS to promote policies that would develop “herd immunity” without a vaccine. In a July 4 email, he wrote, “Infants, kids, teens, young people, young adults, middle aged with no conditions etc. have zero to little risk... so we use them to develop herd [immunity]... we want them infected.”

All of these criminal policies have been pursued by both the Republicans and Democrats on behalf of Wall Street. The interviews with Trump by Bob Woodward made clear not only that Trump understood the gravity of the public health threat early on and decided to deliberately “downplay” the risks so as not to create a “panic,” by which he meant a selloff on the stock market, but that Woodward, the *Washington Post* and ranking members of the Democratic Party withheld this vital information from the public for seven months.

In this context, the work done by Rebekah Jones and others in continuing to track infections and deaths related to the pandemic through independent, comprehensive databases, takes on a heroic character.

In contrast to the teachers unions’ deliberate separation of teachers across state lines, we call on all Florida educators to build a statewide Florida Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to unite with ours in Texas and others across the US. Join us in defending Rebekah Jones and the scientific principles for which she stands! Fight to unify the immense opposition in the working class to the homicidal policies of the DeSantis administration!

Our committee adopts the following demands that must be met in order to contain the pandemic and save lives, and we urge Florida educators to fight for these same demands in your state:

1) For the protection of free speech and all whistleblowers! No scientist, worker, journalist or educator should be punished for practicing their First Amendment rights to free speech and free press. The fascistic raid against Rebekah Jones is the latest in a decades-long assault on democratic rights and whistleblowers, including Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and many others. These courageous whistleblowers must be defended by educators and all workers, who share the same interests in knowing the truth about COVID-19, imperialist war, and government and corporate crimes.

2) For full transparency and access to relevant statistical data related to the COVID-19 pandemic! All efforts to manipulate data by covering up infections and deaths must be

opposed. Instead, billions of dollars should be invested in massively expanding COVID-19 testing and contact tracing across the US and internationally. Comprehensive dashboards such as The COVID Monitor must be developed for every school district, every industry and every neighborhood around the world.

3) For the immediate closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces! The work done by Jones and others makes clear that the pandemic is out of control, and that schools and workplaces are the primary vectors for the spread of COVID-19. Under conditions in which vaccines are now being distributed, no effort can be spared to halt the spread of the virus. Only the independent mobilization of educators and the broader working class can secure the closure of schools and workplaces, as the Democrats and Republicans, backed by all the unions, are determined to keep profits flowing to the corporate and financial elite.

4) Full funding and resources for high-quality remote learning! With schools closed, every student and educator must be guaranteed access to high-quality laptops, internet access and other technologies required for remote learning. A mass recruitment campaign to hire new teachers must be launched, so that remote class sizes are reduced to a maximum of 15 students. All parents and nonessential workers must be guaranteed adequate income, health care and access to high-quality food for the duration of the lockdowns.

All of our demands are fully achievable and must be funded through the expropriation of the vast wealth hoarded by the financial oligarchy. Following the bipartisan passage of the CARES Act in March, over the past nine months these pandemic profiteers have raked in over \$1 trillion. All of this wealth must be seized and redirected to meet social needs and the demands above to contain the pandemic.

The Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee stands in solidarity with our Floridian counterparts. As Texans, we too confront a similar enemy: a haunting specter of death emanating from the chambers of our state capitol building. We too live in a state where the pseudo-scientific concept of “herd immunity” without a widely distributed and accessible vaccine is official public policy.

As a result, dozens of our teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, bus drivers and other school staff have succumbed to the virus. Most recently, long-time Grand Prairie, Texas teachers Paul Blackwell, 62, and Rose Mary Blackwell, 65, both succumbed to the virus Sunday. They had been married for 30 years and were beloved members of their community.

Thousands more, including children and young adults, have suffered terrible complications from contracting coronavirus, including one of our committee members, a teacher from an Austin school district which has denied nearly 1,000 teachers’ applications for remote positions, including people with cancer, pregnant women and those with other types of disabilities that put them at high risk.

Even children, previously touted as impervious to this disease, have died. Yet not even the tragic death of a kindergartner has moved our Republican Governor Greg Abbott to change course. As with DeSantis, who is also unmoved by the death of at least nine children from COVID-19 in your state, Abbott gives blind

and unwavering support for Trump.

Texas, much like Florida, has seen numerous teachers forced to resign from their positions due to health concerns. For those left behind in the classroom, we too must endure the madness of the hybrid model and state mandated in-person testing, not to mention a shortage of the most basic equipment necessary to make online instruction successful. Instead of investing in remote learning, our state has similarly diverted funds into hygiene theater.

The reopening of schools has also been implemented by Democratic politicians, including here in Houston, in New York City, and across the US. On Wednesday, Washington’s Democratic Governor Jay Inslee announced his intention to reopen schools in the coming weeks, while similar plans are being set in motion in Chicago, across California, and in other Democrat-led places.

In each instance, the teachers unions and the corporate media have helped facilitate these reopenings based on spurious claims that schools are not a significant vector of transmission.

Upon the reopening of schools, children now account for over 1.6 million infections and roughly 12.2 percent of all cases. Moreover, infectivity and death rates in general saw a massive surge after the schools opened en masse in August and September.

The corporate media would have us believe that the laws of nature are suspended at the school door, and that this phenomenon is better explained by private gatherings and the irresponsibility of the public.

This echoes the sentiment of our governor, who recklessly opened bars and restaurants against the guidelines of health experts and then blamed the predictable uptick in infections on young people, who he said were not taking the proper precautions.

Like the school shooting epidemic, disingenuous “thoughts and prayers” in response to the daily deaths of thousands have drowned out calls for real action. Even in the face of grotesque atrocities, moral sensibilities never moved Democrats and Republicans to contradict the interests of the gun and ammunition industries. Likewise, we should expect no amount of death and suffering to pull at their heart strings now. Only through bold, directed and sustained action on the part of the working class will we be able to put an end to this madness.

In the words of Fredrick Douglass, “Power concedes nothing without a demand.” Florida teachers, unite with us as we demand an end to this war against the working class and represent the courage and integrity we strive to instill in all our students!

We will do everything in our power to help you build rank-and-file committees across your state, to unite with our struggles in Texas and those across the US and globally. Only through such unified action across state lines will we be able to stop the spread of the pandemic, save lives and ensure that public education and all of our social needs are fully met. Sign up today to join this struggle!



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