

Educators and workers across the US denounce arrest of whistleblower Rebekah Jones

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The WSWS is publishing statements of support for data scientist and COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones, who faces persecution in response to her efforts to expose the spread of the pandemic in Florida and in K-12 schools across the United States. We urge our readers to send statements of support for Jones today. Let us know your occupation, what city and state you work in, and whether we can use your name or if you would prefer to remain anonymous.

Rebekah Jones, the COVID-19 whistleblower who was fired by the State of Florida last May, appeared virtually before a judge on Monday morning after spending the night in a Florida jail. She had turned herself in to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) at 11:15 p.m. Sunday night, and the judge agreed to release her on a \$2,500 bond.

In a statement Monday morning, the FDLE outlined that the third-degree felony charge against Jones is that she illegally accessed Florida's emergency alert health system. The warrant alleges that she downloaded and saved health department data containing contact information for "approximately 19,182 people across the state."

The state initially suggested a bond of \$5,000 and argued that Jones should have "no computer access and no internet access," while demanding that she wear an ankle monitor. The judge disagreed and lowered the bond to \$2,500, stating that she is not allowed to contact anyone whose information she allegedly accessed. Upon her release from jail, Jones has relocated to Washington, D.C.

Jones has maintained her innocence and is suing the FDLE for terrorizing her family and violating her First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights. She has been one of the most outspoken critics of the "herd immunity"

policy adopted by the United States government and others internationally.

Sunday afternoon she took to Twitter before turning herself in to the FDLE, tweeting: "Censored by the state of Florida until further notice." She also used the hashtag #LetHerSpeak, which along with #FreeRebekahJones, has been trending on social media amid an outpouring of opposition to the actions of Florida state officials, above all, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis.

Several Twitter and Facebook users—many of whom have taken to calling Florida's governor "Ron DeathSantis"—as well as WSWS readers voiced their outrage and disturbance at the jailing and censoring of Jones.

A laborer who lives in Jacksonville, Florida, who wished to remain anonymous condemned DeSantis for jailing Jones "for the 'crime' of disputing his rosy view of COVID in Florida." He added, "It's very 1940s Germany in tactic. She is not allowed, at this point in jail, to speak in her own defense."

The Jacksonville worker elaborated further, "As an absurdly loyal Trump sycophant, DeSantis imitated every public policy speech Trump made, even going as far as to hold press conferences with people like Dr. Scott Atlas, who promoted the unscientific 'herd immunity' theory." He noted, "DeSantis is fueled by corporate money, and he takes his orders, or shapes his policy, because he ultimately serves Delta Airlines, Disney, and Florida Blue for-profit health care."

When asked whether the attack on Jones was also an attack on workers in the whole state, he said, "Well, yes, an attack on workers, but also an attack on ALL Floridians. Workers, retirees, ALL of us, young and old, are susceptible. People who were screwed over by the unemployment system in Florida, who qualified for

benefits but were never paid, HAD to go to work, with DeSantis sounding the call that all was and is safe—that the spread is not as severe—when, in fact, there is a HUGE risk that a worker in a crowded restaurant will catch it.”

Some Twitter users contrasted the arrest of the whistleblower with the treatment of the participants in the fascist coup attempt of January 6. One user wrote: “If you storm the Capitol and try to murder our leaders, you get sent home on your own recognizance and can tweet 24/7. If you share science and data, you get punished like this. Got it.”

Others directly encouraged Jones to continue her struggle to provide data to the masses, with one tweeting: “I’m sure you ARE being censored, but please continue to document (and safely store said information). At some point, DeSantis WILL have to answer for this. Having documentation will be key when that happens.”

Many of the Florida Facebook groups that organize educators were swimming with comments in opposition to Jones’ arrest. One educator wrote, “It is intimidation. Cops do this all the time to silence people.” Another commented, “So FDLE found nothing on her computers, she sues the state, so the state issues an arrest warrant?”

Educators and school workers from other states have also come to the defense of Jones. Kathy, a school bus driver and member of the Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, wrote that Rebekah Jones “was unfairly attacked by the government for refusing to downplay COVID cases and the health threat that it presents. She and her family were treated as criminals by the police for simply trying to tell the truth. This must stop.”

Kathy also spoke about the response of ruling class to the pandemic more generally, stating, “The government is using the fact that there is now a vaccine to suggest we can go back to normal. It is not. Not everyone will get the vaccine right away, and we don’t even know how long it will protect us. They are normalizing death and blaming us for it. They say we’re not being responsible, but they are making us go to work and school! How hypocritical can you be?”

She also drew a connection between the policies of President Donald Trump with President-elect Joseph Biden. “Biden is continuing the process. He’s not doing anything different than Trump. Everything should be under lockdown now, and the government should be helping people financially. They report the deaths on the news, but they’re not taking it seriously. If they were, we wouldn’t be in this situation.”

Audrey, a teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District, wrote the following to the WSWs: “The attempts by Florida Governor DeSantis to silence scientist Rebekah Jones show how the Trumpian right wing view free speech by the working class as communication that opposes the interests of the rich. Currently, their interest is to support a business-as-usual protocol as if the deadly pandemic doesn’t exist. Governor DeSantis represents the ruling elites, not working people.”

Herman, a regular reader of the WSWs, wrote, “This egregious government attack is yet another attempt by the ruling class to keep workers across the country and around the world in the dark as to the ravages of COVID-19 and to terrorize anyone else who might be thinking about publishing information.”

He continued: “The seizure of her equipment and records is an unconstitutional attack on her democratic right to publish. The use of an accusation of hacking to justify the shutting down of her website demonstrates the deteriorating state of American democracy. I demand the immediate release of all of Rebekah Jones’ confiscated property, financial restitution, and the disciplining and/or arrest of those responsible for the fascistic raid on her home.”

We call on all workers to take up the defense of Rebekah Jones and other whistleblowers who seek to expose the government’s criminal response to the public health crisis. It is in the interests of the working class to fight against censorship and defend all democratic rights. The attack on Jones is ultimately an attack on the working class, who require scientific data and knowledge to save lives.

Educators across the US are organizing rank-and-file committees to oppose censorship and the growth of far-right and fascistic forces and to fight to close schools and fully fund remote learning until the pandemic is contained. We urge educators, parents and students in Florida and across the country to join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee by signing up today at wsws.org/edsafety!



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