

COVID tester at Amazon facility in Virginia dies suddenly of unexplained causes

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Last month, Amazon worker Poushawn Brown, 38, from Alexandria, Virginia died in her sleep of causes that have not yet been fully explained. She had been assigned to work in the COVID testing department at her facility in September of last year.

The day before her death, she arrived home from work with a headache, made breakfast the following morning, and had not been heard from since.

While Amazon is one of the richest companies in the world, her family has been unable to afford an autopsy to determine the cause of her death, which was quoted at \$7,600.

Her sister, Christina Brown, took to social media to raise awareness of her sister's death and to appeal for help. Christina is now the sole caretaker for Poushawn's 12-year-old daughter Gabrielle and their grandmother who is paralyzed. Christina also has three of her own children.

Poushawn's death has not been reported or investigated by the mainstream news outlets nor by the local Virginia news. It was first reported by independent journalist Jordan Charlton.

Poushawn leaves behind one daughter as well as a paralyzed grandmother who was dependent on her for support. This tragedy has provoked an outpouring of support, and nearly \$35,000 in mostly small donations were made to a GoFundMe page established by her sister.

"There were no shields, facemasks or PPE other than a cloth mask provided," Christina told Charlton in an interview. "The working conditions were horrible. There was no hazard pay or bonuses. During the time she was working at that job, she only got tested one time."

Christina, who now has possession of Poushawn's phone, said that her supervisor called to ask why she

wasn't showing up for work. Christina told her that she had died. The supervisor said they were "so sorry" and they would send her Poushawn's final pay.

No one from Amazon called to offer condolences until after Poushawn's death garnered over 4,000 re-tweets. Then an HR official reached out to Christina asking questions about the details of her death.

The death is being covered up by Amazon management, which has not even informed its workers of Poushawn's death. An Amazon worker at the BWI2 fulfillment center in nearby Baltimore told the WSWs: "We didn't receive any information about that [the death in Virginia] ... [but] this is the type of thing everybody should know." He added, "This is like a death in the family."

The Amazon worker is part of an independent rank-and-file safety committee established by workers in the facility last year to oppose unsafe working conditions at Amazon, demanding workers' oversight over safety and quotas, regular testing, transparency about infections and deaths, and an end to speed-up and poverty wages.

Amazon, which has hundreds of thousands of new workers over the past year to keep pace with rising demand for online shopping, admitted last fall that roughly 20,000 of its employees had contracted the virus.

Poushawn told her sister that she would get text alerts when a worker tested positive for COVID-19. "There were at least 10 to 15 alerts a day." She continued, "There were multiple people that came in on different occasions who were sick, somebody came in and threw up right there; she said she wasn't going to clean it up, cleaning crew didn't want to clean it up—they never closed the warehouse."

Amazon workers, who start at only \$15 per hour,

faced desperate social conditions even before the pandemic. The online retail giant is notorious for brutal speedup, enforced by advanced tracking technologies, which often cause workers to injure themselves while trying to “make rate.” The *World Socialist Web Site International Amazon Workers Voice* has interviewed several workers who became homeless after skyrocketing medical bills and stonewalling by Amazon’s workers compensation system.

The news website *Inside NoVa* reports that Amazon has created a \$2 billion-dollar fund consisting of “loans, lines of credit, and grants” to provide 20,000 low-income houses to shelter its workers in 3 major market areas. This would either rehabilitate or build low income housing in Northern Virginia, Washington State’s Puget Sound region, and in Nashville, Tennessee. Meanwhile, Amazon is locating its HQ2 corporate offices in nearby Crystal City, which is adjacent to Alexandria, VA.

Amazon has been literally profiting off of mass death during the coronavirus pandemic. Its gross revenue surged 84 percent to \$386 billion last year, according to financials released by the company on Tuesday. The company’s stock price has nearly doubled since mid-March to over \$3,300 per share, making it the third-most valuable company in the world by market capitalization. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who is stepping down later this year to take over as chairman of the company's board of directors, is the neck-and-neck with Tesla CEO Elon Musk for the title of wealthiest person in the world, with a net worth of nearly \$200 billion, up from \$113 billion in April.



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