

Postal worker in Chicago dies in apparent suicide in mail truck

Marcus Day
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A young postal worker was found dead in Chicago Monday night, apparently hanging herself in the back of her mail truck, according to a report from a police scanner and comments by union officials.

At 10:20 p.m. Monday, @Chicago_Scanner, a Twitter account that posts frequent updates of police radio activity, tweeted, “Female mail carrier hanged herself in the back of the mail truck.” The tweet was in response to a question from another user, who had posted images of emergency vehicles and a mail truck outside their apartment, asking, “Have you heard anything around Belmont/Elston? This is outside of my apartment right now. There’s police tape up too and at least 5-6 cop cars.”

The deceased appears to have been Candy Bertocci, a 27-year-old letter carrier from the Champaign-Urbana area in central Illinois, based on numerous posts by Bertocci’s friends and coworkers at the United States Postal Service (USPS) on Facebook.

A staff person for the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), one of the two main unions covering USPS workers, commented that Bertocci was apparently just starting her second day of work in Chicago, and had only begun as a city carrier assistant (CCA) in Urbana last September.

The death has been met with an outpouring of grief and sympathy by Bertocci’s friends, fellow USPS workers, and Chicago residents.

“Candy Bertocci was one of a kind, who touched everyone she ever met,” one former classmate commented on Facebook. “She was a wild, fun, loving woman who always made everyone around her smile and made everyone laugh. She was kind and empathetic and always looked out for others when she could.

“You were loved by so many, it’s hard to believe you’re gone. Just know you will never be forgotten and

you’ll always be loved.”

On Tuesday, a group of postal workers brought together balloons and wrote messages in a memorial for her. A worker who posted video of the gathering commented that Bertocci had come to Chicago to assist them at the Kedzie-Grace Post Office (also known as the Daniel J. Doffyn Station), in the Irving Park neighborhood on the city’s North Side.

Much remains unknown about the details of Bertocci’s tragic death and the factors which may have immediately precipitated it. However, working conditions at USPS, having already deteriorated substantially over recent decades, have drastically worsened over the past year, placing unbelievable psychological pressures and physical demands on workers.

In the forefront, the COVID-19 pandemic has enacted a gruesome toll among USPS employees, who throughout much of 2020 were provided little to no safety measures or personal protective equipment, leading to spontaneous walkouts and other job actions by workers.

As with many other work sectors, little information has been made available about the true scope of the virus’ impact on the hundreds of thousands employed at USPS. However, in December, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy—a Trump crony widely despised for his attempts to accelerate the privatization of the postal service and contempt for workers—said in a letter that more than 14,000 workers had contracted COVID-19, and 119 had died. As of the week of February 3, 16,000 postal workers were in quarantine either due to testing positive or being exposed, according to data from the American Postal Workers Union (APWU).

In the midst of these hazards, postal workers have been attempting to keep up with a surge in mail volume

in recent months, both due to the 2020 US election's mail-in balloting (which Trump and DeJoy sought to sabotage) and a record number of holiday packages, 1.1 billion, sent by many family members who were self-isolating over Christmas.

In December, a Chicago postal worker who contracted COVID-19 spoke out over the spread of the virus, linking it to the delays in mail service, telling a local CBS News affiliate that there was "zero communication" from USPS about new cases, and there was not enough staffing to handle their workloads.

Throughout the pandemic, the two major postal workers unions, APWU and NALC, have left workers to fend for themselves, refusing to call strikes over blatantly unsafe working conditions, while at the same time seeking to channel opposition to Trump and DeJoy behind illusions in Biden and the Democrats, who have been no less culpable for the attacks on postal workers.

Despite enjoying overwhelming support in the population, the postal service has been increasingly starved of funding under successive Democratic and Republican administrations, leaving USPS perpetually on the verge of financial crisis, and with cost-cutting measures relentlessly imposed on workers. Between 1999 and 2019, over 300,000 full-time positions were cut or made into part-time positions, with the annual salary for the lowest tier falling from \$64,691 (adjusted for inflation) to \$39,218 during that time. As in the auto industry and elsewhere, an increasingly multi-tier workforce has been established, with older and more senior workers being forced out and the pay and benefits for the youngest generation being decimated.

Most recently, the internal wrecking operation launched by DeJoy has produced widespread mail delays, which many workers have heroically sought to counteract in order to ensure timely delivery. Combined with pervasive understaffing, however, mail carriers have been increasingly working six or seven days a week. The postal service has gone so far as to appeal to carriers in the region to volunteer to come to Chicago, where delays have been particularly bad, to assist with mail service. Bertocci herself seemingly came to the city to help with the overwhelming backlog, based on coworkers' comments on social media.

The grueling pace and conditions which USPS workers face, and the inevitably tragic consequences, are mirrored throughout the shipping and logistics industry, and beyond. The same day Bertocci was discovered dead, an Amazon worker at the LAS7 fulfillment center in North Las Vegas, Nevada, jumped to their death. On Tuesday, the Clark County coroner and medical examiner's office officially ruled the death was a suicide, identifying the man as 48-year-old Paul Vilseck.

An Amazon worker at LAS7, speaking anonymously, told NBC News that when she arrived to work, the company was erecting barricades near where the worker's body had been found, but without explaining at first that someone had died. "Nobody knew what was going on," she told the channel. "Everyone was so confused."

Work at USPS and have comments or a story to share? Contact us today. Workers' identities will be kept confidential.



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