

# Baltimore Amazon workers: Amazon must provide all information relating to the death of Poushawn Brown!

Amazon BWI2 rank and file safety committee

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The Baltimore Amazon rank and file safety committee calls on Amazon to publicly reveal all information that it has in relation to the death of Poushawn Brown in Springfield, Virginia in January of this year. In addition, we demand that Amazon provide compensation to Poushawn's family members and completely revamp its COVID-19 testing sites inside its facilities.

Poushawn Brown was a 38-year old mother living in the Washington, DC suburbs of Northern Virginia. She worked inside Amazon's DDC3 facility in its COVID-19 testing department. According to Christina Brown, Poushawn's sister, she died on January 8 after arriving home from a shift complaining of a headache. After lying down to take a nap, Poushawn never again awoke. The cause of Poushawn's death was never determined due to prohibitively high costs for an autopsy.

The BWI2 rank and file safety committee was formed in December of 2020 following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the efforts of Amazon and other multibillion dollar corporations to subordinate health and safety to their profit goals.

We are an organization of, for, and led by Amazon workers which defends the rights and safety of our fellow co-workers. Our goal is the exposure of conditions at Amazon and the lies of management meant to cover them up.

We call upon Amazon to provide a full account, with all information that it has available, about the cause of Poushawn Brown's death. Brown's job detail inside DDC3's COVID-19 testing department would have brought her into daily contact with people who possibly had contracted the deadly illness. What was the daily case rate of COVID-19 infections at the DDC3 facility? Was Brown infected on the job?

The cause of Brown's death may never be known due to the length of time since her passing. Amazon's failure to obtain an autopsy for Brown is doubly suspicious as it aids a conspiracy of silence surrounding the circumstances of her

death. Had the company shown an abundance of concern for the tragic loss of one of its employees, it would have reached out to Poushawn's family and, after offering condolences, would have paid the cost of the expensive procedure to ascertain the cause of death.

Determining the cause of death would have informed Amazon if its employees and the public at large were at risk of an illness or disease connected to its facilities. In Ontario, Canada, outbreaks of COVID-19 at Amazon warehouses have resulted in disease transmission rates that are greater than that of the surrounding community and have driven the pandemic in the region.

In Brown's case, none of this was done. Christina Brown, in remarks made last month to the *International Amazon Workers Voice*, stated: "I was told [by Amazon] that they would get back to me [about Poushawn's death, but] they never did." The *IAWV* reported in February that Amazon only offered condolences after news of Poushawn's death went viral on social media.

The reason for Amazon's silence is obvious: If her death is connected to the DDC3 facility then Amazon could be held liable for the tragic loss. Had Brown's death been the result of COVID-19, it would have not only made the company liable, but it would have also raised questions about the effectiveness and safety of Amazon's COVID-19 protocols.

Brown was not a registered nurse nor did she have any specialized background in healthcare. This could potentially make Amazon responsible for criminal negligence in its on-site operations. Workers in discussion with the *IAWV* have noted that Amazon's self-administered swab tests are not well-explained; giving the company a level of deniability if workers themselves fail to detect positive cases.

Furthermore, the discovery of an outbreak at the DDC3 site would have resulted in calls to shut the facility down for mandatory cleaning and sanitizing. Amazon took none of the necessary precautions. Nor did it seek to inform workers at

the factory, or throughout the company, that a COVID-19 tester had mysteriously fallen ill and died. As frontline workers and fellow Amazonians, we have a right to this information.

Amazon, which spares no expense in equipping its facilities to monitor the movement of every single worker in its workforce, should reveal what it knows about Poushawn Brown's interactions and potential exposures. The company has boasted previously about the supposed unparalleled safety of its warehouses during the pandemic and should have nothing to fear from revealing whatever information it has on Brown's death.

In addition, we demand that Amazon provide adequate resources and support to Brown's family, who have been traumatized by their loss. To this date, all that has been offered to the Brown family is two months of grief counseling, the last of which was used up last week.

The Brown family's loss is irreparable, but Amazon, which posted a record-breaking profit of \$21 billion last year and whose owner and founder Jeff Bezos has reported a personal fortune of over \$180 billion, has more than enough wealth to provide assistance and to make sure such a tragic loss befalls no one else in its warehouses.

With this in mind, our independent rank and file committee at BWI2 calls on Amazon to provide:

- A *genuine* system of contract tracing within Amazon's facilities. Workers must know, in real time, the number of cases, the department and the shift time in which a COVID-19 case has been detected. All workers known to have been in proximity to infected individuals must be allowed to quarantine for two weeks with full pay and health benefits.

- Paid time off with no threat of termination for workers unwilling to risk themselves during the pandemic. The rehiring at the same wage or higher for workers previously terminated for protesting and resisting Amazon's abuses.

- Accessible, reliable, safe testing and vaccination for all employees who desire them. *These items should be overseen and administered by medical professionals with the required background training and experience in their fields.*

- Closure of facilities for necessary cleaning. If an outbreak is detected at a fulfillment center, it must be closed for at least two days and deep-cleaned with no loss of pay to the workers affected.

- An end to abusive speed-up. Extended break periods at the end of every hour to maintain health and safety. "Time Off Task" (TOT) tracking and other forms of harassment must be abolished.

- Immediate reinstatement of hazard pay with retroactive pay increases.

In relation to Poushawn Brown's tragic death, we demand:

- The release of all information relating to the death of Poushawn Brown, including job requirements, on-site interactions and potential exposures. This should include internal company communications and deliberations about how it should respond to Brown's death.

- Full financial and medical support for the Brown family, paid for by Amazon.

A struggle for such demands must be completely independent from all representatives of the capitalist two-party system as well as the corporate-controlled trade union bureaucracies. The latter have done nothing to protect workers from exploitation before or during the pandemic.

For its part, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), which is wrapping up a unionization drive at Amazon's BHM1 facility in Bessemer, Alabama, has said nothing publicly about Poushawn Brown. Nor has it published any demands for raising the living standards of workers at the BHM1 facility.

We issue a call to all of our Amazon co-workers to read the *International Amazon Workers Voice* and to become familiar with the story of Poushawn Brown. For workers in the Baltimore region, join our rank-and-file committee. For workers across the United States and the globe, join our growing network of independent rank-and-file safety committees and help fight to defend yourselves and fellow coworkers from the callous efforts of management and the corporate-controlled two-party political system to allow COVID-19 to run rampant in our workplaces.

The Brown family has set up a gofundme page to help defray costs as they seek justice for Poushawn.



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