

Decatur, Georgia grocery store worker killed by shopper who argued about wearing a face mask

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15 June 2021

A checkout clerk was shot dead at a Big Bear supermarket in the Atlanta suburb of Decatur, Georgia on Monday by a customer who had argued with the employee after she asked him to wear a face mask in accordance with the city's COVID-19 pandemic policies.

Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) officials identified the victim as Laquitta Willis, who was 41 years old. The GBI said the shopper entered the grocery store at approximately 1:10 p.m., “got into an argument with a cashier about his face mask” during checkout, left the store without making a purchase “but immediately returned inside.” The statement said the man “walked directly back to the cashier, pulled out a handgun and shot her.”

GBI officials identified the shooter as Victor Lee Tucker, Jr., 30, of Palmetto, Georgia. Following the shooting of Willis, Tucker began shooting at a DeKalb County Sheriff reserve deputy “who was attempting to intervene while working off-duty at the supermarket.” The two exchanged gunfire and both were wounded in the gunfight.

Tucker was subdued and arrested by two DeKalb County Police Department officers “as he was attempting to crawl out the front door of the supermarket.” Willis was taken to Grady Memorial Hospital where she was pronounced dead. Tucker was taken to the same hospital and is listed in stable condition. The deputy was in stable condition at Atlanta Medical Center. GBI also reported that another Big Bear cashier was grazed by a bullet and was treated at the scene.

Fox 5 Atlanta reported that coworkers left flowers at the supermarket Tuesday in memory of their coworker.

Willis had worked at the store for approximately 10 years.

DeKalb County Police spokesperson Michaela N. Vincent said that Tucker faces charges, including murder and two counts of aggravated assault.

The mask wearing policy that is in place at Big Bear, and which was being enforced by Willis, follows the city's Face Covering Ordinance that was extended until June 21 by the city manager on May 14. In her memorandum, City Manager Andrea Arnold explained that—even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had advised that people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 “may discontinue wearing masks in most settings”—the city was extending its requirement because of the low percentage of DeKalb County residents who had been fully vaccinated.

Arnold wrote in her memo, “According to the CDC's Vaccine Data Tracker, 19.8% of the DeKalb County population over the age of 12 is fully vaccinated, compared to 42.5% of the U.S. population over the age of 12. Within the next 4-5 weeks, most people who desire to be vaccinated should have the opportunity to be fully vaccinated which will provide an opportunity to re-visit the face covering ordinance at the June 21, 2021 City Commission meeting.”

As indicated by the vaccination statistics, DeKalb County, which includes a portion of the city of Atlanta and its eastern suburbs, has high rates of poverty and lack of health care, especially among children. According to “The Kids Count Data Book” published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, DeKalb County ranks significantly higher than the national average in multiple indices such as children in poverty (24.6

percent vs 18 percent) young children not in school (62.5 percent vs 52 percent) and children without health care (8.9 percent vs 5 percent).

The incident in Decatur, Georgia is one of many such events where individuals have engaged in verbal and physical confrontations—some leading to serious physical injury or death—while employees were attempting to enforce mask wearing requirements during the coronavirus pandemic.

Most recently, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reported that the agency has received 1,300 “unruly passenger” reports from the airlines since February, of which 260 are being considered for further action. This number is equal to the total complaints from the airlines in the entire previous decade. There are four individuals who are currently facing civil fines of nearly \$70,000 for clashing with airline staff about mask wearing requirements.

In one instance, a female passenger traveling from the Dominican Republic on a JetBlue flight bound for New York on February 7 refused to wear a mask aboard the plane, hurled an empty liquor bottle, threw food and shouted obscenities at flight attendants, according to the FAA. She grabbed a flight attendant, injuring her arm, and struck another flight attendant twice, causing the flight to return to the Dominican Republic.

An Iowa man who was convicted of assaulting and spitting on another man in a fight over how he was wearing his mask was sentenced on Monday to 10 years in prison. The confrontation took place last November when Shane Wayne Michael, 42, of Des Moines, was asked by a fellow customer, Mark Dinning, to put his mask above his nose. The encounter led to a fist fight in the parking lot between the two with Dinning telling authorities that Michael began assaulting him, at one point, spat on him, coughed on him and yelled, “If I have it, you have it!”

According to *Forbes*, there have been seven people killed following disputes over masks, mostly inside retail stores, in addition to the shooting in Decatur on Monday. Among these deaths were the fatal shooting of a security guard at a Family Dollar in Flint, Michigan in May 2020, the killing of a Louisiana police officer in connection with his attempt to stop a maskless man from attending a high school basketball game, the death of a Baltimore, Maryland transit worker who was shot and killed by a bus passenger who he attempted to turn

away for not wearing a mask and the beating death of an 80-year-old man at a bar in Buffalo, New York by a man who he confronted about not wearing a mask.

Forbes also reported that there have been dozens of confrontations that have left people critically injured. Among these was the shooting in April of a security guard at a North Carolina bar as well as armed attacks at a Wawa gas station in Pennsylvania, a strip club in Sacramento, a supermarket in Ohio and a Waffle House in Colorado that have left employees and patrons injured. There have also been threats of mass shootings following mask disputes, including at a church in St. Louis, Missouri and at a Publix grocery store in Florida.

Responsibility for the death of Laquitta Willis as well as the other violent confrontations and threats of violence regarding mask wearing during the COVID-19 crisis—which is far from over in the US or internationally—lies squarely with the ruling class and its criminal response to the pandemic. Along with the deadly “herd immunity” policy, the profit-driven efforts to force workers back on the job and children back into the schools and the poorly implemented vaccination program, the Democrats and Republicans and the corporate media have persistently sowed public confusion about the life-saving significance of mitigation measures such as mask wearing and social distancing.

Meanwhile, the Republicans and fascist far-right mounted throughout the pandemic a political and ideological campaign against any measures which would have stopped the spread of the virus and saved hundreds of thousands of lives, culminating in the January 6 coup attempt and assault on the US Capitol, based on the anti-working class position that mask wearing is an attack on individual freedoms and should be rejected. Now, with President Joe Biden in the lead, the Democrats are working to remove all remaining restrictions on economic and social activity and thereby encouraging these reactionary views.



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