

Truck drivers protest 110-year sentence for young driver whose brakes failed in 2019 Colorado crash that killed four

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Last Monday, 26-year-old truck driver Rogel Aguilera-Mederos, a Cuban immigrant, was sentenced in Colorado to 110 consecutive years in prison for a 2019 crash that killed four people and injured others. The sentence has sparked protests by fellow truck drivers, and an online petition demanding clemency has been signed by a million people in less than a week.

Aguilera-Mederos, then 23 years old, was transporting lumber on Denver's I-70 freeway when the brakes on his big rig truck failed on a downhill grade. His truck then slammed into traffic that was stopped due another accident. The crash caused an explosion that killed Doyle Harrison, 61; William Bailey, 67; Stanley Politano, 69; and Miguel Lamas Arrellano, 24.

Aguilera-Mederos was found guilty on 27 counts and was sentenced to the minimum of 110 years under a Colorado sentencing law which considers first-degree assault and attempted first-degree assault as so-called "crimes of violence" which must run consecutively when pertaining to a single incident.

In an emotional address to the judge, he sobbed at his sentencing and pleaded for forgiveness. "I was working hard for a better future for my family," Aguilera-Mederos said. "Please don't be angry with me for saying I was not out robbing a bank or a store. I was not out shooting up crowds or a school. I was not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. I was working and I lost my brake. Truck drivers know this hard moment when you lose your brake. There's nothing you can do... I am begging for forgiveness...I have never thought about hurting anybody in my entire life..."

The excessive sentencing of 110 years in prison and the emotional plea by the young immigrant driver has

struck a deep chord among millions of workers around the world and has been met with a mobilization and coordinated actions of solidarity among truck drivers.

Drivers have responded by posting videos on social media stating their support for Aguilera-Mederos by calling for a refusal to drive goods into Colorado using the hashtag #notrucksincolorado #nounloadsincolorado and #freerogel. A video has gone viral on TikTok with over 5.8 million views and thousands of comments of support, showing a long line of trucks parked along the side of a freeway refusing to enter Colorado. "This truck is no longer going to Colorado. We want justice for Rogel Aguilera. Truckers, he needs our help," @ntgi2020 posted. One top comment to the post which was liked 23,000 times replied, "I am a trucker and will NO LONGER be going to Colorado."

Meanwhile an online petition on Change.org calling for commutation as time served, or the granting of clemency to Aguilera-Mederos has been signed by more than 4.2 million people in the last five days. Part of the petition reads, "Rogel Lazaro Aguilera-Mederos, 23 has nothing on his driving record, or on his criminal history. He had complied with every single request by the Jefferson County courts, and investigators on the case. Hes [sic] passed all of the drug and alcohol tests that were given including a chemical test. This accident was not intentional, nor was it a criminal act on the drivers [sic] part."

On Thursday, Colorado Governor Jared Polis was compelled to tell the press, "We review all clemency applications, we've yet to receive one from the individual, but every clemency application that we receive, we review and make a determination."

The fact that the crash was caused due to improperly

functioning brakes ultimately points to the negligence of the truck company Aguilera-Mederos was driving for, Castellano 03 Trucking LLC, based in Houston, Texas. Denver's ABC 7 reported in April 2019 that now inactive records from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration had shown there were 19 vehicle inspections that resulted in 30 violations at the company over the two years prior to the crash.

“Over that time period, drivers have been hit three times for having chafing or kinking on their brake tubes and also for having their brakes out of adjustment, respectively,” ABC 7 reported.

Much has been made of the fact that Aguilera-Mederos had failed to take a runaway truck ramp when he was trying to engage his emergency brake, but many drivers on social media have come to his defense stating that the dangerous passes through the mountainous region are difficult for even seasoned drivers. Numerous drivers even question if Castellano 03 Trucking had provided Aguilera-Mederos with the proper training to know how to handle such a situation or if Aguilera-Mederos, who required translation services for his trial, was proficient enough in English to read the signs that marked the path to the runaway truck ramp. If true, the trucking company should be held liable to ensure drivers are well versed enough to read safety signage.

The sentencing of Aguilera-Mederos came less than a month after a Kenosha, Wisconsin jury acquitted fascist shooter Kyle Rittenhouse of murder for killing two people, wounding a third, and nearly striking a fourth with his AR-15 rifle during protests against police brutality where he actively sought to confront protesters. Numerous workers on social media have compared the two cases and the grave injustices in both, with one asking “Are we living in an upside down world when an actual killer is found not guilty and a rookie driver that loses [sic] his breaks found guilty, tags as criminal, given 110 years.”

Many commentators have attempted to portray the punitive sentencing compared to Rittenhouse acquittal as another example of racism and “white supremacy,” while downplaying the powerful multi-racial support that Aguilera-Mederos has received from millions of workers who see their plight in his struggle for justice. “As a trucker my self we stay on road for many days before we see back our families this is clearly an

accident which can happen to anyone. This guy doesn't deserve this. I'm with you brother 100%,” one trucker wrote.

Additional protests are planned in the coming weeks calling for a pardon or reduced sentencing for Aguilera-Mederos.



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