

Truck driver boycott forces Colorado state to begin process to lower the 110-year sentence for young driver in 2019 crash

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Within one week of the cruel 110-year prison sentencing of 26-year-old truck driver Rogel Aguilera-Mederos for a crash which killed four, the Colorado state government has been forced to backtrack in the face of powerful protests and a boycott of the state by truck drivers, supported by a mass online petition.

While the size of the protest by drivers is unclear, hundreds and likely thousands of truck drivers have united in an organized boycott, refusing to deliver goods and drive into Colorado, posting videos on social media and sharing widely the #nottruckscolorado hashtag and declaring their dedication to the justice for the driver, who was 23 years old at the time of the accident, caused when his brakes failed.

Aguilera-Mederos's emotional plea to the judge where he sobbed and begged for forgiveness has been met with a powerful determination by truck drivers and millions of workers who have come to his defense.

Videos associated with the hashtag #NoTrucksToColorado have been viewed 11.4 million times, with thousands of comments of support pouring in from workers. One trucker wrote "Cross that state off my list to haul freight... people get less time for premeditated murder." Another wrote "Truckers stand together and stand strong, we are a force to be reckoned with. The mainstream media will not give its undivided attention because they know we could bring the Govt to its knees if we just stand together for a cause."

With over 4.6 million signatures at the time of this writing, the Change.org petition calling for commutation as time served or for the granting of clemency for Aguilera-Medero has become the fastest growing campaign of the year on the petition site, and is the third-most signed petition in 2021.

Aguilera-Mederos was found guilty on 27 counts and was sentenced to the minimum of 110 years under a Colorado law which says that so-called "crimes of violence" must run consecutively rather than concurrently when pertaining to a single incident. The anger toward the excessive sentencing has called into question before many the entire framework of punitive mandatory minimum sentencing.

Adding insult to injury, it has been revealed that the prosecutor for the case, Kayla Wildeman, celebrated the harsh verdict, posting on social media that she was given a trophy of a semi truck brake shoe by Chief Deputy District Attorney Trevor Moritzky for attaining the 110 year sentence, calling it a "special gift." The grotesque celebration of the excessive sentencing points to the brutality of the criminal justice system and the power of prosecutors in determining the extent of charges.

While the entire book was thrown at Aguilera-Medero, workers on social media have noted the vast difference in attitude taken by the same prosecutors when defending the police, noting that the gifter of the brake trophy Moritzky sought only a misdemeanor plea deal consisting of 90 days jail and four years probation when Officer Curtis Lee Arganbright was charged with brutally raping an intoxicated arrestee in the back seat of his police car in 2017.

Anger and outrage have been so widespread that numerous state officials have been forced to speak on the case. State Senator Julie Gonzales noted on social media that sentencing has come up in conversations with lawmakers and Colorado Democratic Governor Jared Polis in recent days.

Polis relayed what was his second message on the

subject in less than a week, with a spokesperson from his office noting that he will “welcome an application” for clemency from the defense and would “expedite” its consideration.

On Tuesday the *Denver Post* reported that First Judicial District Attorney Alexis King had “quietly moved to reduce the 110-year sentence” on Friday by starting the process to potentially reduce the sentence. King requested for a court hearing with District Court Judge Bruce Jones, who can reconsider the mandatory minimum sentence for Aguilera-Mederos due to “unusual and extenuating circumstances.” This is a testament to the strength of the protests, and the DA’s office was clearly given orders from above to respond.

James Colgan, Aguilera-Mederos’s defense attorney, stated yesterday that the moves by King and the District Attorney office are about “political survival,” adding that “They’re feeling a lot of heat and they want their foot off the fire as quickly as possible.”

Colgan said Aguilera-Mederos submitted a petition for clemency to Polis’s office on Monday, stating they do not trust the DA’s office to “come up with any kind of fair number.”

The plight of Aguilera-Mederos, a Cuban immigrant who was 23 at the time of the accident has hit a deep nerve throughout the population. The majority of the working population sees in Aguilera-Mederos their coworker, their neighbor, and themselves. Despite the brutality inflicted upon immigrants daily by the US government, the vast majority of the working class wish to defend immigrants and the working poor who face immense difficulties and are often deprived of justice in the judicial system.

Giselle Castañeda, who comes from a family of truck drivers who own the trucking company 4u2inc, told the WSWs “My dad has been a truck driver since before I was born. I’ve talked about this with him and we think its super unfair, he thinks it’s great the strikes are happening in Colorado.”

Speaking to the dangerous working conditions that truck drivers face Giselle noted that for drivers and particularly shipment drivers, “You are always at risk. Even getting a flat tire can cause a lot of damage. You are constantly risking your life. It’s a very hazardous job. When your breaks go out or something like that happens it’s completely out of your hands at that point.”

Giselle noted she was struck by the testimony of

Aguilera-Mederos that he was afraid to wreck his truck and sacrifice himself, “In that moment you don’t know what to do, he said ‘It was either me moving aside and killing myself, and I was scared to kill myself.’” She said she thought of herself, “I am 23 myself, and the thought that I would be going to jail for life for something that isn’t even my fault is so unfair! I support that his sentence gets really reduced or he comes out free.

Speaking to the widespread support Aguilera-Mederos has received, she noted, “I think its great that all different types of backgrounds and ethnicities are coming together to support him. Immigrants are the backbone of the country--they do everything.”



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