

“If the parents didn’t have to work, I don’t think they would have their baby in daycare right now”

Virginia preschool teacher shares her story with the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic

Zac Thorton
1 March 2022

A preschool teacher in Virginia recently agreed to speak with the *World Socialist Web Site* and contribute testimony to the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. Out of concern of reprisals from school administrators, she has chosen to use an alias, and certain details of her job have been omitted to protect her anonymity.

Educators have been among the most impacted by the pandemic in the US, with tens of thousands becoming infected and at least 2,281 having lost their lives to a preventable disease, according to the most comprehensive informal tracker. The true toll on teachers is likely far greater than what has been officially reported, given the efforts of the federal and state governments to suppress information on the pandemic.

In Virginia, newly elected Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin has taken efforts to scrap all remaining COVID-19 mitigation measures in the state, declaring that Virginia is “open for business.” Nearly 1.65 million Virginians have tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, and 18,536 have needlessly died, the majority of which took place under former Democratic Governor Ralph Northam.

Describing herself, Jodie said, “I’m a preschool teacher at a church-operated private school. I work with infants. Our youngest that we have is a little over 3 months old, and the oldest is around 10 months. Basically, I just take care of the babies, make sure they have their needs met, and make sure they’re reaching their age-appropriate [developmental] milestones.”

Referring to the state government’s response to the pandemic, Jodie remarked, “First, I thought when Northam closed down schools, that [it was] because he was a medical doctor, he knows how dangerous this situation is. Time went on and he started to lessen the restrictions, and I just thought, ‘What is he doing?’

“He went down to the local boardwalk for some function, and he didn’t wear a mask, and he tried to play it off that he didn’t

know so many people would be there. Then we get Youngkin, and the first thing he does is end the mask mandate for schools. My school is upholding the mask requirement, but they aren’t really enforcing it.”

Since the pandemic began, Jodie has worked at a number of different schools. She explained, “I don’t switch jobs this much usually, I just had no idea it was going to be this bad during the pandemic and literally all of the schools I went to are doing the same things.

“In 2020, I was at a different school than where I am now. We were closed for about three months after the governor shut down the schools. At first, they kind of kept us up in the air on whether or not they were going to pay us while we were not working. Eventually they said they would give us partial pay. Some employees received full pay while we were out, but [school administrators] wouldn’t say how or why some got full pay and others didn’t.”

When asked what educators in her area typically make in terms of income, she stated, “I’m not sure what the average is for this area, but for daycare teachers it’s pretty low. I only make \$13 per hour, and that’s the higher end. That’s considered a lot for what I do.

“I’ve asked for a raise several times at my current job, and they haven’t given me one. There is a church council that determines the school’s budget, and when I told them I would go to the council to demand a raise, my boss said that the pastor would tell them to fire me.”

Jodie’s experience regarding the pandemic has varied from workplace to workplace. “At the school I was working at when the pandemic hit, they made us, on an individual basis, figure out how to be as safe as possible in the classroom.

“They told us you have to wear a mask and stay 6 feet apart, and they gave us guidelines on what we should be doing for extra cleaning, but basically we had to figure out how to run our classrooms by ourselves.

“When you work with babies, you can’t stay 6 feet apart. That’s not an option. You have a really hard time keeping babies 6 feet apart because you have some that can crawl. They spit up, they have blowouts, and you have to figure out how to keep the room clean.

“Then in 2021, I went to work at another day care, and the infant room floor was so dirty that I did not want to sit on the floor. That’s where you spend most of your day, the floor. They had these ‘bouncers’ that you can put the babies in, and they can jump, and they were gross. I asked a co-worker how to take one apart to clean it, and she had no clue how to do it, which means they were probably never cleaned. I went to the administrators, and they just downplayed it. I quickly got out of there.”

Scientists and epidemiologists have repeatedly stressed the need for adequate ventilation to help control the spread of the virus, especially during the winter months when more people congregate indoors.

Asked if this was ever considered by school administrators, Jodie replied, “Nope. Never considered it. Never heard them talk about it. The school I work at now is definitely an older building, but they made some modifications, such as adding doors to the outside in each classroom. There are no windows in my classroom other than the glass doors to the outside.

“They wanted to put more sinks in, but they didn’t have the money to do that, so some rooms have sinks which aren’t connected to plumbing. Instead, the sinks have two big jugs of water, one for fresh water, and one to capture used, dirty water. We have to carry those huge jugs daily to empty them out and refill them, and they are quite heavy.”

New information has revealed that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US has withheld critical information regarding the virus throughout the pandemic. Last Friday, the CDC issued new unscientific guidelines on masking, designed to facilitate the Biden administration’s policy of “living with the virus.”

To this, Jodie commented, “I don’t have much respect for the CDC anymore. I don’t think they work for the people. I think they do what the government tells them to do. It’s really horrific.”

Regarding the protocols that her school has in place, Jodie commented, “They flip flop back and forth on masks depending on what the CDC says or the governor says. At one point they were telling people who are vaccinated to not wear a mask, but they’re currently recommending that people wear a mask even if they are vaccinated.

“I don’t know how they’re going to move forward with the new CDC recommendations. I know there are a few staff who will push back if they do decide to stop requiring masks. I actually plan to put a sign on my classroom door that reminds parents to mask up before entering my classroom.

“In the beginning of the pandemic they were checking temperatures at the door, but they no longer do that. They don’t

enforce the rules when it isn’t convenient for them. I’ve seen the higher-ups at work not wearing masks. I know for a fact that the director of the school’s kids were out with COVID, but she was still coming to work. If you are exposed, you should be home.

“If a student or teacher tests positive, and they are in your class, then they’ll inform you, but they won’t inform you if, say, a teacher in another class was exposed. When we approached the school administrators, they told us it wasn’t our business.

“Right now, I don’t think they’re paying anyone who has to miss work because of exposure to the virus. Their policy is, if you’ve been out for five days and you aren’t symptomatic, you can return to work. A staff member who recently tested positive was out for five days, but she still didn’t feel good. They guilted her into coming back and she did. They said she had to come back.

“At a previous school, a co-worker came up to me and told me that a teacher had tested positive. That teacher had been in our classroom, and the administration didn’t bother to tell us that we had been exposed to someone who tested positive. When I went to the front office to ask why they didn’t inform me, they told me that the teacher who tested positive was a disgruntled employee who was just trying to get out of work.”

Jodie spoke about the economic forces driving the reopening of schools, a process which is aimed at sending parents back into unsafe workplaces to continue producing profits for the capitalist ruling class.

Describing the impact on parents at her school, she said, “We do have one parent who has an infant in my classroom, and after the holidays they haven’t come very often, saying they don’t want their child to get COVID. That parent was ultimately forced to send her child to the school because she had to go to work. If the parents didn’t have to work, I don’t think they would have their baby in day care right now.

“Even parents who are forced to work at home are in a difficult situation, because it’s hard to take care of a baby and work at the same time. It’s not an ideal situation.”

Jodie concluded her remarks by commenting on why she chose to take part in the Inquest, saying, “I just want people to know we are tired and frustrated, and we are sick of being treated as disposable even by people who claim to care about us and claim ‘we’re a family.’”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact