

Family, friends and supporters hold Washington D.C. memorial service on second anniversary of Amazon COVID-19 tester Poushawn Brown's death

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On Sunday, friends, family and supporters gathered in Washington D.C. to honor the memory of Poushawn Brown, an Amazon COVID-19 tester who died suddenly in her sleep two years ago. The 38-year-old single mother died shortly after returning from a shift at the nearby DDC3 Amazon warehouse in Northern Virginia.

At the time of her death, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote, “The death is being covered up by Amazon management, which has not even informed its workers of Poushawn’s death.” Amazon sought to distance itself from the case, offering her surviving relatives an insulting few weeks of grief counseling as compensation. This was despite the company’s responsibility for assigning Poushawn to the dangerous job, which exposed her to the deadly disease every day.

Starting in 2018, Poushawn worked at Amazon in Northern Virginia, explained Christina Brown, Poushawn’s older sister. “She started out as a driver, she went on to work at [Amazon] Fresh. From Fresh, she went to Prime. Then she went to the warehouse at DDC3,” where she became a COVID-19 tester.

Christina has been a tireless force fighting to expose the truth about her sister’s death. “I will continue to tell [Poushawn’s] story to people who know it and people who don’t,” she said in her initial remarks.

“Someone called me last week, telling me that I shouldn’t say... that [Poushawn] did every shift in the warehouse and that she loved that company. No matter what I feel about Amazon, my sister was a loyal, faithful and dedicated employee... she never said ‘no.’”

“As I go back to January 8, 2021,” she said, “I keep

thinking to myself: did I do everything when I made that first call to her on that Friday morning? I should have sent somebody the second time she didn’t answer... Did the EMTs do everything they were supposed to do? I keep replaying it [in my mind].”

“But I have to go to the root,” she explained. “I [could have] sent somebody on the first, second or third” call, but “the root of the problem is Jeff Bezos having employees without medical [training] illegally COVID testing.”

Christina said she didn’t hear a word from Amazon after her sister’s death, except for a call from Human Resources inquiring why Poushawn hadn’t shown up to work.

Poushawn Brown’s death typifies the trillion-dollar corporation’s criminal disregard for its workforce. Just days before the event, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy confirmed that Amazon would proceed to fire 20,000 white collar employees. In justifying this, Jassy said it was unfortunate, but “long-term opportunities with a stronger cost structure,”—that is, profits—made it necessary.

On Monday, the *Guardian* reported on the death of a worker at a facility in Colorado Springs. Rick Jacobs, a 61-year-old worker, died of a heart attack before a shift change, states the article.

Rather than stop work, a “makeshift barrier” was set up “around the deceased worker using large cardboard bins,” while “work carried on as usual in the facility as workers were not informed of [the] colleague’s death.” The *Guardian* added that “managers stood around to make sure no one came near for privacy and security.”

“What gets me is the lack of respect for human life,” reacted one worker anonymously. “We shut down for maintenance. Do you think we could not have had a little respect and shut down long enough to at least get the body out of the facility and clean up after him before people are milling around like nothing’s happening?”

The company is infamous for its callous treatment of workers. Other Amazon workers at the event also attested to their own wrongful firings at the hands of the multinational corporation.

Onlookers gathered throughout the event, held in the upscale Kalorama neighborhood, the site of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos’ Washington D.C. residence. In addition to local activists, the Brown family also arranged for a local singer to give a performance in Poushawn’s memory.

At one point, a call to local police was placed by an anonymous caller from the neighborhood and several patrol cars showed up to monitor the peaceful gathering.

Amazon Labor Union founder Chris Smalls denounced “politicians and prominent people that are silent about this issue [Poushawn’s death], that know about this issue because I personally brought it to their attention,” yet have not used their positions of prominence to bring it greater national attention.

In fact, the Democratic Party politicians, including President Biden who held a White House meeting with Smalls, defend the capitalist, who sacrifices the lives and limbs of workers to boost corporate profit. In 2021, there were 5,190 fatal work injuries in the United States, up 8.9 percent from 2020, and this did not count the tens of thousands of workers who died after contracting COVID-19 on the job.

In a moving conclusion to her remarks, Christina Brown reiterated a promise she made to her sister: “On that day... I got your back, your front, your side, your everything, I am your keeper... as long as I have a breath in my body.”

“Justice is this year, justice is coming,” she concluded.

Brown spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about her determination to bring justice for her sister. “Last year, I almost didn’t make it,” she explained. “I missed my sister so much” on the first anniversary of her death.

“More and more, my niece [Poushawn’s daughter] is starting to look like her. I promised her that I will never stop” seeking justice for her mother.

Christina explained that, despite her niece’s autism, “she can put anything together, she’s taught herself how to crochet.” Christina said she encourages her to “do your best. If God forbid something happens to me, she will be able to keep going.”

“To think, someone in her situation, she’s dealing with difficulties at school, people telling her she can’t do things. I’m so proud of her. Others would have given up. I can’t wait for her to grow up. My sister should also be here to see her.”



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