

Second Baltimore DPW employee dies on the job in four months

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Yet another employee with the Baltimore Department of Public Works (DPW) died on the job on November 8. Timothy Cartwell, who was a waste collector at the Western Sanitation Yard, was trapped between a utility pole and a trash truck in an alley while out on his route. He was 60 years old.

Cartwell, known as “Timmy” to his friends and family, had been a DPW employee for 17 years. Part of a large and loving family, Cartwell was one of eight siblings and loved spending time with his relatives and friends.

The son of a truck driver, Cornelius Payne, who instilled in Timmy a dedicated work ethic, Cartwell only called out of work when he was too sick to go in. Outside of the job, he cherished helping neighbors and delighting neighborhood children with holiday decorations. Though he had no children of his own, every year on his birthday Cartwell would organize an online fundraiser for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

Video obtained by local news station WJZ shows Cartwell’s last moments. In the video, the trash truck is moving down an alley behind Monroe Street with no room to maneuver except backwards and forwards. In the tight space, Cartwell became trapped between the truck and a utility pole.

One of Cartwell’s colleagues who saw him two days before he died told WJZ that DPW provides inadequate training for how to work in tight alley spaces such as the one where Cartwell was pinned. In some cases, alleys are too small for the trucks to go down so trash bins have to be moved to the street for disposal.

DPW employees and loved ones of Cartwell protested outside of City Hall last Friday, November 14, to call for action and justice in the wake of the incident. No one from the City Council attended despite

invitations and the fact that event was taking place directly outside Council chambers.

Speaking at the demonstration, Shantae Carroll, Cartwell’s sister-in-law, said, “My brother-in-law was not just a trash man. My brother-in-law was a man of courage, of good deed, of love, of support, of giving. He was kind. He was gentle, and he was a man that stood for what was right.”

Calling for justice for Cartwell, Carroll appealed to city leaders, “We need for you to step up, do what’s right, fix what needs to be fixed. Don’t wait another second. Don’t wait another minute. Don’t wait another hour because we don’t know the day or the hour that something can happen. Tragedy will come, and this will happen again.”

Cartwell’s death follows that of another DPW worker, Ronald Silver II, who died from overheating while out on his trash route in August. The Silver family joined Cartwell’s loved ones at City Hall last week.

Silver’s death, at age 36, prompted a series of City Council hearings on working conditions at DPW. The initial hearing following the worker’s death revealed what the *World Socialist Web Site* stated at the time was “medieval working conditions” at the department. DPW workers face long hours, low pay, decrepit facilities, aging trucks, and retaliation from management.

The August city hearing revealed extreme disconnects between the rank-and-file workers at DPW, on the one hand, and City Hall, DPW management, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union that (mis)represents them. DPW administrators were unable to answer basic questions about safety operations. Workers testified that they had been abandoned by their

union representatives and city councilors.

Both Cartwell and Silver had worked out of the Western Sanitation Yard on Reedbird Avenue. A July report issued by the city's inspector general had cited that yard for being in violation of numerous safety codes. The report issued by the Office of the Inspector General requested "immediate action to be taken to prevent further risk and explore alternatives, including a possible alternate work site."

The Baltimore City Office of Inspector General has been conducting investigations into conditions facing DPW workers, while the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health Administration has opened an investigation into Cartwell's death.

One of the issues in Cartwell's death is the dilapidated condition of the massive 32-ton trash trucks used throughout the city by workers like Cartwell and Silver. New trucks used by the city have cameras installed that show all sides of the vehicle, but the vast majority of the city's trash trucks do not.

As was shown with Silver's death, the city has not made available resources, training, equipment upgrades, or staffing improvements to address the underlying safety hazards for DPW trash collectors. Furthermore, the city has refused to release health and safety data for DPW to AFSCME, which would give a better understanding of the frequency of safety incidents and their severity.



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