

Tragic deaths of 2 homeless children in Detroit must sound alarm for workers to end poverty and inequality

Socialist Equality Party
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A funeral service is being held Thursday, February 20, for A'millah Currie, 2, and Darnell Currie Jr., 9, at the Triumph Church on the eastside of Detroit. The two children died in the early morning hours of February 10 from apparent hypothermia inside a van where their homeless family was sheltering from freezing temperatures in the Hollywood Casino Hotel parking structure. The following statement was issued by the Socialist Equality Party to workers and young people in Detroit.

The Socialist Equality Party joins the residents of metro Detroit and beyond today, who are mourning the tragic deaths of two-year-old A'millah Currie and nine-year-old Darnell Currie Jr. We express our condolences to their grieving mother Tateona Williams, and our solidarity with all those who are angered over the shocking and totally unnecessary deaths of her two young children.

These deaths are not only a tragedy, they are a crime that was the result of capitalism and the callous indifference of both political parties that defend the profit system. Tateona, her mother and five children were homeless and had been sheltering in their van at various casino parking structures across the city for the last three months. Her repeated pleas for help from the city's homeless services, including the Coordinated Assessment Model, or CAM, were ignored.

At a press conference, Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan claimed the city has ample resources to address homelessness but residents were not using them. He admitted that Williams had called city homeless agencies at least three times, but "For whatever reasons it was not deemed an emergency." That did not stop the mayor from pointing an accusing finger at the young mother who had lost her children, saying, "The family never called back for service."

In interviews with the local media, the distraught but resolute mother answered these claims: "I asked everybody for help. I called out of state, I called cities I didn't know, I called cities people asked me to call. I even asked Detroit—I've been on CAM list for the longest." She added, "Everybody now wants to help after I lost two kids? ... It took my two kids to die for you to help me? It's too late..."

There is a long, sordid history of city officials blaming the victims of corporate and government neglect and malfeasance. But among workers there has been an outpouring of sympathy for Tateona and her family, including many donations on GoFundMe pages. Among workers there is a keen understanding that the loss of a job or some unexpected expense could put them in the same shoes as Tateona Williams, a 29-year-old unemployed medical assistant.

It is proper to mourn the loss of A'millah and Darnell Currie Jr. and to extend all the support necessary to their mother. But this tragedy must also serve as a call to action by workers and young people to demand emergency measures to resolve the housing and homeless crisis.

Rank-and-file committees in the factories, schools, hospitals and neighborhoods should be organized, free from the union bureaucracies and the two capitalist parties, to mobilize workers in collective action, including mass protests, demonstrations and strikes.

These committees should demand:

- The provision of emergency housing for the homeless, including using public domain to seize the unoccupied office buildings, luxury homes and upscale apartment complexes owned by billionaire real estate tycoon Dan Gilbert and the Ilitch family.
- The ending of all evictions and utility shutoffs.
- A crash program to hire tens of thousands of

construction workers and build thousands of affordable housing units throughout the city

This should be paid for by canceling corporate tax cuts and sharply raising taxes on GM, Ford, Stellantis, Bedrock, Huntington Bank and companies which have profited off the exploitation of the working class.

This tragedy exposes the myth about Detroit's supposed "turnaround" after the 2013-14 bankruptcy restructuring, endlessly promoted by city officials and local and national media outlets.

Duggan and other city leaders claimed that new development projects in the downtown area and select neighborhoods would raise property values and living standards for the city's residents. The problem is Detroit remains one of the poorest large cities in America, with a median household income of \$27,838; a 37.9 percent official poverty rate; and a 44 percent child poverty rate. The vast majority of the working class population are working in low-paying jobs or are unemployed like Tateona Williams and have largely been priced out of the housing market.

Between 2020 and 2024, housing values in the Detroit metro area have shot up 72 percent and are now some of the most overvalued in the country. This speculative bubble has been a boondoggle for Dan Gilbert (net worth \$27.4 billion), the Ilitch family (the owners of Little Caesar's Pizza and Detroit's professional baseball and hockey franchises), and other investors.

Gilbert's 49-story skyscraper on the site of the demolished old Hudson's department store includes The Residences at the Detroit Edition, where prices for private homes will range from \$550,000 to \$3 million and beyond. Rents in the new upscale housing units around the city range from \$1,600 to \$4,775 a month.

Conditions in working class neighborhoods continue to deteriorate. A week after the deaths of the two children, a century-old water main burst in Southwest Detroit, flooding hundreds of homes and destroying vehicles and other personal property in the largely immigrant neighborhood. While pipes from the 1930s or older go without maintenance and repair, the Great Lakes Water Authority, which took over Detroit's water and sewer system during the bankruptcy, plans to impose the largest water rate hike in a decade on metro Detroit residents next year.

According to the most recent figures, more than 8,500 people in the city experienced homelessness and about 1,000 were households with kids. During the 2022-23 school year, Michigan public schools identified a

staggering 32,000 preK-12 students who were homeless at some point, a 14 percent increase from the previous year.

The homeless crisis goes far beyond Michigan. The latest report from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development found that 771,480 individuals experienced homelessness in the United States in 2024, up 18 percent from the previous year. This included nearly 150,000 children under 18, the age group which experienced the largest increase (33 percent) between 2023 and 2024.

This is American capitalism in the 21st century. Billionaires like Musk, Bezos and Gilbert on one side and tens of millions of people living on the edge of disaster on the other. Homelessness shot up under Biden, and California Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom bulldozed homeless encampments. Vice President JD Vance scapegoats immigrants for high housing costs, while Trump and Musk denounce homeless people as "violent drug zombies" and prepare to axe Medicaid, housing, education and other essential programs. The gutting of these programs, aimed at funneling even more money into the bank accounts for the mega-billionaires and Pentagon war machine, will result in the social murder of many more victims.

If this is to stop, workers must build a network of rank-and-file committees to unite workers of every race and ethnic background, in the United States and internationally, in common industrial action to defend immigrant workers, stop the layoff of federal workers and the gutting of programs and defeat Trump's plans to establish a presidential dictatorship.

This must be combined with the development of a powerful political movement of the working class, independent of and opposed to both corporate-controlled parties, to replace the rule of the oligarchy with the democratic rule of the working class and expropriate the ill-gotten wealth of the oligarchs. At the same time, a workers government would transform the auto industry and the giant real estate and financial firms into public utilities, and establish socialism, so the scourge of poverty, homelessness and social inequality can be ended forever.



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