

“I don’t want this to happen to another family”—Renita Shores-Gaston

Family of Toledo Jeep worker Antonio Gaston files lawsuit for wrongful death, citing Stellantis safety violations

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The family of Antonio Gaston, the 53-year-old Stellantis worker who was crushed to death on the assembly line at the Jeep Toledo Assembly Complex last year, is suing the company for wrongful death.

The action, filed Monday in Lucas County Ohio Common Pleas Court, claims Stellantis removed safety guards on the conveyor where Gaston, a father of four, was working, causing him to be crushed to death between pinch points on the machine. The coroner said that Gaston died of multiple blunt force injuries and that his death was not instantaneous.

Renita Shores-Gaston, the widow of Antonio Gaston, said at a press conference Monday, “It was the hardest day of my entire life to hear that news, and then to have to call my children and tell them that their dad died at work. It’s been difficult not having him. I miss him so much, and I don’t want this to happen to another family.

“I want to know the truth of what happened to my husband at work, because I haven’t gotten anything—I haven’t gotten any answers ... and it’s coming up on a year,” she said.

Chris Stewart, the family’s attorney, said, “Today’s lawsuit is not just for Mr. Gaston; it is for all of the workers out there to protect them from suffering what was a preventable tragedy that happened to him that day. This lawsuit was filed to get the truth about what truly happened to Mr. Gaston, because we do not believe we are getting the truth from Stellantis.”

Stewart says many questions remain unanswered, including why Gaston, whose job was delivering parts, was tightening undercarriage bolts on the conveyor.

“Workers must be protected,” Stewart insisted.

Stewart has previously handled high profile cases, such as the Baltimore Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse and fatal crashes involving the Boeing 737 MAX aircraft.

The suit charges Stellantis with “deliberate removal of a critical equipment safety guard for pinch points on the inverted IPF Chassis Delivery Conveyor (‘Conveyor System’) on which the Decedent was working at the time of his death.”

All that has been officially reported by the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that investigated the death of Gaston is the following:

At 1:30 a.m. on August 21, 2024, a logistics department stock clerk was providing materials to the production line. While standing on the right side of carriage line 910R, he reached across the conveyor to retrieve a pail on the opposing 910L side. The line activated, catching his torso between the carriage assembly and the conveyor housing. He was pronounced dead at the scene from multiple blunt force injuries.

Three months later, on November 29, 2024, OSHA cited Stellantis for a “serious” safety violation for failing to provide proper machine guarding and protect workers from pinch points on the IPF Chassis Delivery Conveyor, stating, “Without the benefit of effective guarding,” OSHA wrote, “employees were exposed to caught-in/pinch-point hazards created by carrier conveyor components, including steel trolley wheels, travel rail tracks, and vehicle hub assemblies.”

OSHA slapped Stellantis with a paltry \$16,000 fine, a few minutes' profit for the giant corporation. Stellantis has appealed the fine, a process the courts may drag out indefinitely.

"To lose your life for making a car, that just shouldn't be," Renita Shore-Gaston told the *Detroit Free Press*.

"How does that help anybody? How does that make a company want to do better when they're getting fined those small amounts?" she said. "That's like pennies on the ground, I feel like, for that type of company."

Attorneys are seeking details of what happened, including the possibility that Gaston was working on a vehicle at the time and why safety guarding was not in place. They say they are also looking at whether under-staffing may have been a factor, as well as pressure to meet production quotas and overwork.

"A lot of times if you can get a dollar quickly, even if that means sacrificing your workers' safety, a lot of companies will do that," Stewart said.

"There are a lot of questions that have not been answered."

The UAW has taken no serious action to uncover the cause of the accident or to hold Stellantis accountable. The failure to investigate Gaston's death has predictably led to other tragedies, such as the April 7 death of Dundee Engine skilled trades worker Ronald Adams Sr., age 63, who was crushed to death while repairing a machine in circumstances similar to the death of Gaston.

In June, the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) rejected a Freedom of Information Act request filed by the *World Socialist Web Site* for inspection records on the death of Antonio Gaston.

That request was filed in advance of a July 27 hearing investigating the death of autoworker Ronald Adams at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant. The investigation had been launched by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to break through the stonewalling and cover-up of facts by Stellantis, the United Auto Workers and safety regulators.

The hearing at Marygrove Campus in Detroit, attended by around 100 people, took testimony from workers, family members and safety experts on the systematic subordination of workers' safety to the corporate drive for profit.

Like hundreds of other workers, Gaston had transferred from the shuttered Stellantis Belvidere, Illinois assembly plant to work at the Jeep plant in Toledo. The move separated him from his family, who stayed behind in Illinois.

Stellantis has delayed the promised reopening of the Belvidere plant and cancelled the opening of a battery plant in the city, all without meaningful opposition on the part of

the UAW. This stranded hundreds of Gaston's former coworkers, who had hoped to be recalled, hundreds of miles from home.

Workers responded to reports of the lawsuit on social media with statements of support. One posted, "the company usually just gets slapped with a fine unfortunately, Michigan workers' compensation protects the companies ... my family had to deal with this when my brother in-law died in June 2024 from carbon monoxide poisoning on the job, Osha fined the company with 3 serious violations, and we had to fight the companies workers comp just to get the funeral paid for ... which took a year, and because he wasn't married, that's all his life amounted to, if only he didn't go to work that day."

A Jeep worker wrote, "I work at the plant. I didn't know the guy personally but I would definitely go on the stand and testify how bad the safety concerns are there! And OSHA always looks the other way!"

An ironworker, rejecting a claim by a management apologist that Gaston had removed the safety guards himself, said, "(W)orkers cannot remove safety equipment. Impossible. There should have been a cage with lockout/tagout on it to prevent this or a light sensor alarm so it could detect that someone was in that area to prevent it moving. This should've never happened if safety protocols were in place to prevent the machine from moving with a person still under it."

The relentless corporate assault on the working class that finds tragic expression in the series of work-related deaths and injuries can only be halted by the independent mobilization of rank-and-file workers independent of the two corporate controlled political parties, the Democratic and Republican, and the pro-management union apparatus. The IWA-RFC is spearheading this fight. For more information or to become involved, fill out the form below.



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