

April 17, 2023

RE: In support of HB 3568

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice Chair Kropf, and Members Nosse, Scharf, Valderrama, and Wallan of the House Committee on Rules:

A June 1, 2021, article on CNBC.com stated, "Amazon warehouse workers are injured at higher rates than those at rival companies, according to a new study.

"In 2020, there were 5.9 serious injuries for every 100 Amazon warehouse workers, which is nearly 80% higher than the serious injury rate at non-Amazon warehouses, the Strategic Organizing Center (SOC) wrote in a new report published Tuesday. The SOC said serious injuries include any injuries that require employees to either miss work entirely, known as "lost time injuries," or be placed on light or restricted duty.

"The SOC, which is a coalition of labor unions including the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the Service Employees International Union, analyzed recently released data reported by Amazon to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) covering work-related injuries between 2017 and 2020.

"Amazon's 2020 injury rates were higher than Walmart, one of its closest retail competitors. Amazon's overall injury rate in 2020 was 6.5 cases for every 100 workers, according to the study. That's more than twice that of Walmart, which reported three cases for every 100 employees in 2020.

"Separately, The Washington Post on Tuesday published an analysis of OSHA data, which showed that Amazon's serious injury rates are nearly double that of non-Amazon warehouses."

On May 11, 2022, a U.S. Department of Labor blog on the connection between unions and worker safety wrote that every day OSHA inspectors enforce laws protecting American workers, but they cannot be everywhere. Which inevitably leads to unscrupulous employers cutting corners and preventable worker injuries and deaths occurring.

Union representation, it says, is not a "magic bullet", but there is little doubt it makes a positive difference. Publicly reported OSHA data, was the basis for an Illinois Economic Policy Institute survey of the construction industry found union worksites "are 19 percent less likely to have an OSHA violation and had 34 percent fewer OSHA violations per OSHA inspection than non-union worksites. And of the 14 percent of construction industry employees represented by unions, their employers accounted for only 5 percent of the industry's OSHA violations.

The blog concluded that despite best efforts, workplace accidents and deaths will occur. But all of us—employers, unions, workers, and the government—need to recommit to fully reducing those incidents and to entirely eliminating preventable deaths and injuries, and to making workplace safety a core value and "union representation is one important step" in accomplishing those goals.

Amazon's injury rates, driven by quotas and a robot-driven need for extra-human speed have resulted in a burgeoning level of not only injuries, but mental health issues. A January 19, 2023, article in Time Magazine by Billy Perrigo, revealed the toll of working for Amazon. According to it. OSHA inspectors found that Amazon warehouse workers in three locations in Florida, Illinois, and New York were "at high risk for lower back injuries with which workers are required to lift packages and other items; the

heavy weight of the items; awkward postures, such as twisting, bending and long reaches while lifting; and long hours required to complete assigned tasks.”

“Each of these inspections found work processes that were designed for speed but not safety, and they resulted in serious worker injuries,” said Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health Doug Parker, in a statement. “While Amazon has developed impressive systems to make sure its customers’ orders are shipped efficiently and quickly, the company has failed to show the same level of commitment to protecting the safety and well-being of its workers.”

“I was harassed for not reaching my targets, everyday negative feedback, “said a U.K. worker with wrist problems. “I had to explain why I can’t reach the targets even with doctors’ recommendations to not overstrain my hands. Now I’m off work again.”

In its warehouses, Amazon monitors workers via ID card swipes and hand scanners. Break times, regardless of where a worker is located in the warehouse, are timed from the last scan to the first scan after the break. Those with conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which can necessitate longer bathroom breaks cause issues with Amazon’s “time off task” policies. One worker reported, “today I received write-up for “unaccounted for idle time” due to their IBS, and said they are “constantly harassed over missing work or restroom breaks” due to it.

Deliver drivers, surprisingly often employed by third party contractors, have reported being tracked by GPS devices and cameras in their vehicles. Almost two-thirds of the drivers responding to the survey said Amazon’s monitoring practices negatively impacted their physical health. One responded that these targets posed a risk to the general public as, I feel like I’m drowning all day, causing me to drive in unsafe ways” to meet Amazon’s “unreasonable expectations”.

Over half, 51 percent, of those surveyed said Amazon’s monitoring their productivity negatively impacted their health. An article in a 2021 Fordham Urban Law Journal (Under Pressure) stated that Amazon employees reported urinary tract infections because of not having time to use the bathroom, as during a ten-hour shift, employees have only one 30-minute break and two 15-minute breaks. Trips outside of these allowed breaks negatively affect their time to meet their quotas.

The journal reported that restrooms in Amazon warehouses are often five to six minutes from their workstations. A Phoenix, Arizona warehouse worker said they and other workers brought customer orders into the restroom to scan them in order to make quota. Those productivity quotas forced workers to choose between their health and keeping their jobs.

In the OSHA survey, 57 percent of respondents reported Amazon’s monitoring negatively affected their mental health. UNI Global Union (UNI)—a global union federation for the skills and services sectors with affiliate unions in 150 countries representing 20 million workers—in January of this year published an international survey of Amazon workers: “Life In The Amazon Panopticon”. In it, they discuss Amazon’s “excessive expectations” forcing workers to push their bodies to “unreasonable extremes”, while stating how its monitoring affects their mental health even worse.

The UNI survey “parsed out” Amazon workers’ subjective experiences while at work. One of its questions asked them to, in a single word, describe how the monitoring of their work performance

made them feel. Their responses contained 527 unique words and phrases, which a manual review identified as negative. The review then identified the ten most frequently used words or phrases:

- “stressed” and “anxious” – a fear of losing their jobs and concerns of being punished for the smallest errors
- “like a slave”, “like a number”, and “robot” – pointed to a lack of agency and a sense of dehumanization
- “untrusted”, “pressured”, and “prison” – a sense of subjugation
- “fine” – a minority of workers that did not consider work monitoring to be a problem.

The “mental cost” of working at Amazon, expressed in both words and numbers, are in part explained by a “notable absence of positive reinforcement from management, particularly in the warehouse. Workers describe a management culture lacking in basic empathy—one that reflects the unforgiving and fundamentally non-human algorithm that constitutes its foundation”

Customer service workers, it stated, are under intense pressure with not a moment to breath, with 61 percent of them reporting a mental health impact due to a relentless work culture. Even those working from home are subject to these pressures if their work can be quantified.

I am a 69-year-old trans woman with disabilities, but I know the stress of excessive and unreasonable job monitoring, and toxic work environments, as well as the beneficial and positive effects that unions have on both its members and the work force in general. I have over 250 semester hours of university or community college credits, but no degrees. When after a year at Wright State University and four more The Ohio State University, not knowing what I wanted to do careerwise, I suspended my studies for about three decades.

My first full-time job was as a laborer at the Alabama State Docks, where I became a member of the International Longshoremen’s Association. After almost two years, I was caught in a layoff and was hired by Coca-Cola of Mobile, where I became a member of the International Brotherhood of the Teamsters and was eventually elected and served as shop steward for its sales personnel. Coca-Cola of Mobile was the only union soft drink bottling plant in the Southeast and we did over 50 million a year in business.

During the four years I served as a Teamsters steward, I had the honor of serving on the negotiation team and engaging in the collective bargaining process for a new three-year contract as well as handling worker grievances and complaints. We were an open shop, but very few of our non-management employees were not members; regardless, they benefited equally from our contracts and protections.

I worked for Coca-Cola of Mobile for seven years and between there and the Port of Mobile, I—like other non-management employees greatly benefitted from the vital and manifestly important work that unions and the collective bargaining process that they do day in and out. Unions not only protect the rights and welfare of those covered by their collective bargaining, but they also protect those of the general public and even those of management and shareholders of publicly held companies.

They do this by ensuring the safety, health, and rights of employees, which in turn ensures the quality of the products they produce or sell, and the safety of their distribution. Unsafe distribution or delivery of these products endanger our roads, rails, waters, and air. They result in damaged

products, lawsuits, and preventable accidents resulting injury, dismemberment, and death, adversely affecting physical and mental health, as well as financial well-being and profitability of all within and without.

Interestingly, while at Coca-Cola, I discovered that those not covered by our collective bargaining agreement depended on our contracted raises to pave the way for their ability to get raises. Labor unions built America's middle-class, including the wonderful health insurance that most workers had at little or no cost prior to Ronald Reagan's assault on labor and the middle-class.

I left Coca-Cola in the summer of 1986 to move to Tucson, Arizona and begin transitioning. That path unfortunately led to pursue careers at that time and in the ensuing years that were not covered by collective bargaining agreements. I later spent about 25 years involved in information technology in operations, administration, security, and system engineering, beginning with IBM System 36 midrange computers and their AS/400, which became the iSeries, where I wished I had the protection of a union and a collective bargaining agreement.

I have an immense amount of respect and affection for the Teamsters and the work they do! And I am encouraging members of the Oregon House Rules Committee to fully support the Warehouse Worker Protection Act: House Bill 3568. The warehouse workers at Amazon deserve no less and neither does the public they serve.

Sincerely,

Michelle E. Risher
Democratic National Committee Member (OR)