

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 8, 2020

Mr. Jeffrey Bezos
Chief Executive Officer
Amazon.com, Inc.
410 Terry Avenue N.
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Mr. Bezos:

We write to express our continued concern about working conditions at Amazon as well as recent actions Amazon has taken, including the recent firing of an Amazon warehouse employee who was involved in organizing their coworkers for stronger workplace protections at the facility in Staten Island, NY. The right to organize is a bedrock of our economy, responsible for many of the greatest advances achieved by workers over generations. Adding to our concern are leaked meeting notes from a meeting you attended, where top executives at Amazon designed a smear campaign to discredit the fired employee, describing them as “not smart or articulate,” and writing that Amazon would “spend the first part of our response strongly laying out the case for why the organizer’s conduct was immoral, unacceptable, and arguably illegal, in detail, and only then follow with our usual talking points about worker safety.”¹ Indeed, in the time between when this meeting took place and when the meeting notes were made public, multiple senior vice presidents at Amazon took to Twitter to attack and discredit the fired employee.²

Specifically, we would like to know more about the events that led to the employee’s firing. While Amazon says that the employee was fired for violating company ordered quarantine after coming into contact with a worker who tested positive, others have disputed the timeline that would make that violation possible. The employee was ordered into quarantine on March 28th and fired on March 30th; however, Amazon’s own spokesperson has stated that the diagnosed employee in question last reported for work on March 11th.³ That timeline would suggest that a 14-day quarantine would have ended on March 25th, and that the fired employee was not ordered into quarantine until more than two weeks after coming into contact with the diagnosed employee and after they had begun organizing their colleagues to demand more workplace transparency and stronger workplace protections.

We are also concerned about the environment that caused the fired employee and their colleagues to strike. While Amazon has previously touted the steps they have taken to keep

¹https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/5dm8bx/leaked-amazon-memo-details-plan-to-smear-fired-warehouse-organizer-hes-not-smart-or-articulate

²<https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/2/21206108/amazon-chris-smalls-warehouse-strike-nyc-jay-carney-bernie-sanders-coronavirus-safety>

³<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/31/amazon-strike-worker-fired-organizing-walkout-chris-smalls>

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their workers safe, workers at the Staten Island facility claim that they were in short supply of personal protective equipment like disposable gloves and masks—allegedly, associates were limited to two pairs of disposable gloves per week, even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that users throw away gloves after every use.⁴ Workers at other Amazon facilities have said essential supplies like hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes are being rationed, and at times are wholly unavailable.⁵

Amazon has recently said “[w]hen anyone on our team at any level purposely puts the health of others at risk, we will take swift, decisive action without concern about external reaction.”⁶ We hope this standard will be enforced equally across the organization and not just applied to the lowest-ranking workers who power it. Any failure of Amazon to keep its workers safe does not just put their employees at risk, it puts the entire country at risk.

We ask that you provide a written response to the concerns raised in this letter, and to the questions listed below, no later than April 14.

- When did the fired employee come into contact with the diagnosed employee? When did Amazon ask them to self-quarantine?
- How many other employees at the Staten Island location were told to self-quarantine and when were those employees told?
- Will Amazon assure the public and its employees that they will allow their workers to freely and publicly address concerns they have in the workplace without fear of retribution?
- What criteria is Amazon using to decide whether to shut down a warehouse after a worker tests positive? Will Amazon agree to temporarily shut down a warehouse whenever a worker tests positive?
- How does Amazon plan on improving transparency during instances in which a worker tests positive? Will Amazon agree to let their employees know whenever a worker at their worksite tests positive?
- How is Amazon ensuring that there is adequate essential supplies at their facilities, including disposable gloves and masks as well as essential supplies like hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes?

Sincerely,

/s/ Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez
United States Senator

⁴<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/29/amazon-workers-in-staten-island-plan-strike-over-coronavirus-safety.html>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶<https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/2/21206108/amazon-chris-smalls-warehouse-strike-nyc-jay-carney-bernie-sanders-coronavirus-safety>

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/s/ Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator