

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 12, 2019

Mr. Jeffrey Bezos
Chairman, President, and CEO
Amazon.com Inc.
1200 12th Avenue South, Suite 1200
Seattle, Washington 98144

Dear Mr. Bezos:

We write to express our concerns regarding numerous reports that Amazon's delivery standards are imposing unfair and dangerous conditions upon the delivery companies and the drivers who deliver its packages. Amazon should vigorously and proactively monitor the companies it does business with and ensure its contractors are adhering to labor laws and safety regulations. We urge Amazon to immediately cease business with contractors that violate labor laws and to promote standards that protect its drivers and ensure public safety.

On August 31, 2019, *BuzzFeed News* published a startling article detailing the inner workings of Amazon's delivery organization.¹ According to the report, Amazon has created a system of deception – using a variety of underhanded tactics to skirt Department of Transportation (DOT) oversight and legal accountability for the treatment of drivers in its delivery network. Whereas competitors are required to adhere to safety standards set by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) – including training compliance and routine vehicle inspections – Amazon's network of third-party contractors allows the company to run its delivery service virtually unregulated.

Unfortunately, Amazon's evasive practices and moves to cut regulatory corners have not been without incidence. According to a joint investigation by *ProPublica* and *The New York Times*, there have been “more than 60 accidents since June 2015 involving Amazon delivery contractors.”² Innocent bystanders – as young as 9 months old – have lost their lives and sustained serious injuries from drivers improperly trained and under immense pressure by Amazon to meet delivery deadlines.³ It is simply unacceptable for Amazon to turn the other way as drivers are forced into potentially unsafe vehicles and given dangerous workloads.

¹ Caroline O'Donovan and Ken Bensinger, “Amazon's Next-Day Delivery Has Brought Chaos and Carnage to America's Streets – But the World's Biggest Retailer Has a System to Escape the Blame,” *Buzzfeed News*, September 6, 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/carolineodonovan/amazon-next-day-delivery-deaths>.

² Patricia Callahan, “The Deadly Race: How Amazon Hooked America on Fast Delivery While Avoiding Responsibility for Crashes,” *ProPublica*, September 5, 2019, <https://features.propublica.org/amazon-delivery-crashes/how-amazon-hooked-america-on-fast-delivery-while-avoiding-responsibility-for-crashes/>.

³ Patricia Callahan, “Amazon Pushes Fast Shipping but Avoids Responsibility for the Human Cost,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/05/us/amazon-delivery-drivers-accidents.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>.

Moreover, Amazon has repeatedly claimed it is not liable for the conditions in which drivers work or the pattern of dangerous operating tendencies by drivers. However, it is clear that the aggressive managerial style Amazon forces upon the delivery companies it contracts with is a major contributor to the strenuous conditions drivers face and has led to a chain of worker abuse. In particular, delivery companies that do not fall in line to Amazon's demands can have their routes diminished, contracts terminated, or invoices unfilled. Fearful of retaliation, delivery companies pass on Amazon's unfair terms to drivers, who have reported being "forced to skip meals, ordered to urinate in bottles rather than stop for bathroom breaks, and advised to speed and not wear seatbelts to ensure they delivered more packages in less time."⁴ The relentless pressure created by Amazon's delivery policies raises serious concerns about the working conditions its independent contractors and drivers face – creating a system of worker exploitation and abuses.

While Amazon has continuously made claims that it treats its workers fairly and has "requirements for safety" in place,⁵ fines levied by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration paint a notably different picture: Amazon has a history of ignoring labor laws and fostering work conditions that are detrimental to the safety and basic humanity of its workers. Additionally, growing media reports,^{6,7} regarding Amazon's mistreatment of workers and failure to address lawmakers and agency concerns, are deeply troubling.⁹ Amazon's demonstrated lack of commitment to its workforce – whether on the road delivering its packages or processing orders in its warehouses – is contradictory to the policies that the company claims to have in place.

Amazon is a company that prides itself on technological innovation and big ideas, but continues to struggle with basic standards of public safety and responsibility. Amazon's pursuit of larger profit margins, increasingly unsustainable delivery expectations, and methods to avoid regulatory and legal oversight are alarming. Further, we are disappointed by Amazon's repeated disregard for workers' rights and consumer safety.

With these concerns in mind, we look forward to your response to the following questions:

1. How does Amazon currently determine its contracts with third-party delivery companies? What safeguards are in place to prevent the company from contracting with organizations

⁴ O'Donovan and Bensinger, "Amazon's Next-Day Delivery."

⁵ Amazon News, Twitter post, September, 6, 2019, 8:58 a.m., <https://twitter.com/amazonnews>.

⁶ Shannon Liao, "Amazon Warehouse Workers Skip Bathroom Breaks to Keep Their Jobs, Says Report," *The Verge*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/4/16/17243026/amazon-warehouse-jobs-worker-conditions-bathroom-breaks>.

⁷ Nina Godlewski, "Amazon Working Conditions: Urinating in Trash Cans, Shamed to Work Injured, List of Employee Complaints," *Newsweek*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/amazon-drivers-warehouse-conditions-workers-complains-jeff-bezos-bernie-1118849>.

⁸ Micheal Sainato, "'We Are Not Robots': Amazon Warehouse Employees Push to Unionize," *The Guardian* (London, UK), January 1, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jan/01/amazon-fulfillment-center-warehouse-employees-union-new-york-minnesota>.

⁹ Shannon Liao, "Amazon Warehouse Workers."


that have open lawsuits against them for unsafe working conditions? Will Amazon commit to ending contracts with companies that have violated labor laws, or have long and checkered track records?


2. How many delivery companies does Amazon currently contract with across the United States? How many of these companies have registered worker treatment complaints by their employees? Will Amazon commit to publically disclosing the delivery companies with which it contracts?
3. What steps does Amazon enlist to ensure its drivers and warehouse employees are treated fairly, according to the law? How often and to what extent does Amazon audit its delivery contractors and warehouses for compliance with labor laws?
4. Has Amazon ever taken any action to thwart the creation of a union? Does Amazon believe that its third-party drivers and warehouse workers should be able to unionize?
5. What training and qualifications does Amazon require of its drivers? To what extent is Amazon involved in the hiring, firing, and delivery oversight of drivers it independently contracts? How often and to what extent does Amazon audit its delivery contractors for compliance with transportation safety standards?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We respectfully request a response no later than September 27, 2019.

Sincerely,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate


ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate


SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate