



Safety Concerns Arise After Tragic Death Of Young Gig Worker

Insights

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Last month, 19-year-old Antawani Wright-Davis, who worked as a bicyclist delivering food for an app-based food delivery service, was struck and killed by a dump truck while working in Boston. Because of Wright-Davis' status as an independent contractor, his estate was not eligible for any kind of workers' compensation benefits. Unable to pay for his funeral, his family started a GoFundMe page to help with expenses.

The tragic story of Wright-Davis has once again raised concern among workers' advocate groups and state labor departments about the safety of gig workers. Jessica Martinez, co-executive director of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH), has some especially harsh words for the gig economy, instead calling it the "Tinder economy." "When a temp worker is done with his or her shift," she says, "the boss swipes left and claims to have no further obligation."

One of the prime concerns raised about the safety of gig workers is the fact that the industries most likely to utilize them – ride-sharing and delivery services – are among the most dangerous in the country. According to the National Employment Law Project, taxi drivers and chauffeurs are five times more likely to be killed on the job than other workers. Martinez stresses that young workers are particularly at risk since they have less experience with safety hazards, have not always received proper training, are more likely to be in a motor vehicle accident, and are less likely to raise safety concerns with gig businesses they contract with.

The biggest problem, obviously, is that modern gig businesses cannot readily offer benefits such as workers' compensation coverage without threatening the very independent contractor model that serves as the foundation for the overwhelming majority of gig economy companies. This is yet another reason why gig reform is necessary from state and federal regulators.

We have discussed the recent push for portable benefits programs for gig workers several times on this blog, including the introduction of federal legislation—"Portable Benefits for Independent Workers Pilot Program Act"—which would provide \$20 million in grant funding to help states, localities and nonprofit organizations experiment with portable benefits models for gig economy workers. State legislators in New York and Washington are also fighting for legislation that imposes a fee on gig economy transactions and establishes an independent fund to offer portable benefits for workers. Only time will tell whether these bills will pass and whether other states will follow suit. Meanwhile, COSH continues to work with several local organizations to push legislation to

protect temporary and gig workers from a workplace safety perspective. Stay tuned to the blog for further developments.

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