

State AGs tell Amazon to boost paid sick leave during coronavirus crisis

The group, led by Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, sent a letter to Amazon CEO and founder Jeff Bezos and Whole Foods CEO John Mackey to request the change. Amazon has owned Whole Foods since 2017.

A group of 15 attorneys general on Wednesday called on Amazon to increase its paid sick leave during the coronavirus pandemic, as a way to help its hourly employees and slow the spread of the virus.



The group, led by Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, sent a letter to Amazon CEO and founder Jeff Bezos and Whole Foods CEO John Mackey to request the change. Amazon has owned Whole Foods since 2017.

"These companies must act quickly to minimize the risk of transmission in their stores and warehouses," Healey said in a statement Wednesday.

The letter was signed by the state attorneys general of Massachusetts, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington, as well as the attorney general from the District of Columbia.

"As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, we remain laser focused on serving customers and ensuring the well-being and safety of our employees and those they care for," an Amazon spokeswoman said Wednesday in an email statement. "This is a top priority as they work to provide an essential service to our country."

The new call for more paid sick leave comes as Amazon has seen an uptick in warehouse employees coming down with the virus, with 10 known cases reported by local and national news, as of Wednesday. Amazon has

been working to prevent the disease from harming its workers by instituting a number of new protocols, including increased cleanings and staggering start times and break times at warehouses.

This work is happening at the same time Amazon is trying to manage a flood of new orders coming in as millions of Americans are asked to stay home.

The attorneys general join a growing list of groups that have asked Amazon to increase paid sick and family leave for its warehouse workers and delivery drivers, which include the workers themselves, the activist group Athena and Sen. Bernie Sanders.

The world's largest online retailer already offers up to two weeks of paid sick leave for any Amazon employee who is quarantined or was diagnosed with COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus. It also offers unlimited unpaid time off through April for hourly workers. The company created the \$25 million Amazon Relief Fund to help independent delivery businesses, gig workers who pick up work through Amazon Flex and seasonal employees.

The attorneys general said Amazon should provide several more weeks of job-protected leave, including up to 12 weeks off to care for children during school closures, with a large portion of that time paid, though potentially at a lower rate.

As Amazon has faced pressure to protect its employees during the crisis, Bezos sent out an open letter to his workers over the weekend thanking them for their efforts.

"We're providing a vital service to people everywhere, especially to those, like the elderly, who are most vulnerable. People are depending on us," Bezos wrote on Amazon's company blog.

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