



# OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

## Opening Statement of Chair Alma Adams (NC-12)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

*Unsafe and Untenable: Examining Workplace Protections for Warehouse Workers*

Zoom

Thursday, November 17, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

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Today, we are meeting to examine the workplace safety crisis in warehouses and our responsibility to protect the health and safety of all workers.

The demand for warehouse work is rapidly increasing. Between 2000 and 2017, warehouse jobs increased by 90 percent, and the rise of Amazon and the COVID-19 pandemic have only accelerated this growth. Since January 2020, alone, the number of warehouse workers in the U.S. grew by more than a third, to 1.8 million workers.

To meet the growing demand for warehouse work, unscrupulous warehouse employers have pushed workers to their limits and prioritized productivity and speed over safety. As a result, warehouse workers today face greater danger in workplaces that were already precarious.

For example, after Walmart failed to meet OSHA standards, a 40-foot shelf fell on top of a warehouse worker and caused her severe neck and back injuries. Workers at a Rite Aid distributor center along the Mojave Desert worked without air conditioning, leading to several cases of heat-related illness. And warehouse workers across the country lacked adequate protections from COVID-19, despite the essential role they played during the pandemic.

These tragedies are not isolated incidents. In 2020, the warehouse and storage industry in the U.S. suffered an injury rate nearly double the rate among all private industries.

Injury rates at Amazon warehouses are especially alarming. According to a recent report from the Strategic Organizing Center, in 2021, the serious injury rate for workers at Amazon warehouses was more than double the rate at non-Amazon warehouses.

This injury rate has a direct impact on workers. At the Amazon warehouse in Staten Island, workers face backbreaking work, 60-hour plus workweeks, 10-hour shifts with mandatory overtime, and dehumanizing working conditions. During a three-week period in the Summer of 2022, four Amazon workers died at four separate warehouses. And, nearly a year ago, six employees were threatened with termination if they stopped working to seek safety during a tornado. Clearly, something is wrong.

Worse still, these incidents represent only a fraction of a larger, under-reported problem. Companies across the country contract and subcontract with staffing agencies that place temporary workers in warehouses. These workers are usually placed in more dangerous conditions than permanent workers, safety training is insufficient or nonexistent, and host employers typically treat temporary employees as expendable. This was the case for Edilberto Zamora, a temporary worker who died after his skull was crushed on the job. His sister is with us today to tell his story.

We should all agree that warehouse workers, like Edilberto, should not have to risk their lives to provide for themselves and their families. And we must ensure that employers are held accountable when tragedies do occur.

To that end, the Department of Labor must continue oversight of unsafe working conditions in warehouses and Congress must continue working to protect the health and safety of all workers. I want to thank Congressman Norcross for his continued advocacy on behalf of warehouse workers in New Jersey and across the country. His leadership and this subcommittee's work are particularly important as our economy rapidly modernizes and demand for warehouse work continues to increase.

While the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress is coming to a close, I look forward to working with my colleagues in a bipartisan way to ensure every worker comes home safely at the end of their shift.