

Amazon warehouse workers unionization vote to move ahead

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Amazon warehouse workers in Alabama will begin voting on unionization which would be a first for the e-commerce giant

Amazon workers at a large US distribution center will begin voting Monday on whether to unionize after labor regulators rejected a request by the e-commerce giant to delay the process.

Ballots will be mailed to workers at the fulfillment center in Bessemer, Alabama, and voting will continue through March 29, according to the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union conducting the drive.

Amazon had asked the National Labor Relations Board last month to reconsider allowing mail-in balloting, and instead require in-person voting.

"Amazon's blatant disregard for the health and safety of its own workforce was demonstrated yet again by its insistence for an in-person election in the middle of the pandemic," union president Stuart Appelbaum said in a released statement.

"Today's decision proves that it's long past time that Amazon start respecting its own employees; and allow them to cast their votes without intimidation and interference."

Amazon contended in NLRB filings that the bargaining unit of approximately 5,800 employees was "unusually large," arguing in-person voting would be more manageable.

"Our goal is for as many of our employees as possible to vote and we're disappointed by the decision by the NLRB not to provide the most fair and effective format to achieve maximum [employee](#) participation," Amazon said in response to an AFP inquiry.

Amazon had proposed an on-site election process, validated by specialists at guarding against Covid-19, so workers could vote before, after or during their shifts at the distribution center, the spokesperson added.

NLRB officials said in their order denying Amazon's request that there were no substantial issues in need of review and reasoned that the safety

of all involved with the voting "is best served, at this time, by avoiding the type of in-person gatherings that a manual election entails."

Formation of a bargaining unit at Amazon facility in Alabama would be the first successful effort in the US to unionize workers at the major employer.

Amazon said it opened the distribution center in early 2020, offering [health benefits](#) and starting pay of \$15.30 in a state where the legal minimum wage is less than half that amount.

Amazon is the second largest employer in the US with more than 800,000 employees, most of whom are "essential workers" who can't do their jobs from home, according to letter it recently sent offering to make its network part of the government's Covid-19 vaccination effort.

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