

Registered sex offender violates probation, gets job covering school stories

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 30 August 2019 01:27



Pedophile currently in jail for violating probation in Colo.

Following the Gallup-McKinley County Schools Board of Education meeting Aug. 6, Judith Goins, criminal investigators administrative assistant for McKinley County Sheriff's Office, was inundated with phone calls about one of the meeting attendees.

Goins received nearly two dozen calls regarding the status of Guy Priel, 53, of Woodland Park, Colo., and what he was doing at the GMCS meeting. Goins said those callers suspected Priel might be a sex offender.

After some research on OffenderWatch, the software program used by the State of New Mexico to register sex offenders, Goins verified Priel was a registered sex offender in Santa Fe and Chama, N.M., and had last registered as homeless with the Colorado Springs Police Department in July. He is required to register as an offender every month due to his homeless status.

Further, Priel had obtained employment with a local publication and was assigned to write stories regarding education and the local schools.

McKinley County Chief Investigator Lt. Merle Bates said Aug. 20, Priel missed an important step for someone in his position who gets a job.

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“He has to tell an employer he’s a sex offender, otherwise he’s violating probation,” Bates said.

Mike Hyatt, superintendent for Gallup-McKinley County Schools, said the district is disappointed in the hiring of a registered sex offender to cover school stories.

“We never expected this blatant disregard for our students’ safety by [the publication] sending a serious child sex offender to their school,” Hyatt said Aug. 20.

Hyatt added he does not understand how Priel’s offenses could have gone unnoticed.

“A simple Google search shows that this person should never have been sent to our schools,” he said.

CHARGES AND PROCEDURES

Previously, Priel served 3 years in prison after being convicted on 10 counts of possessing child pornography in New Hampshire Sept. 10, 2004.

Priel was also convicted of sexual assault Aug. 11, 1993 and was placed on 4 years probation.

Before arriving in Gallup, Priel had worked for publications in Hobbs, N.M., Las Vegas, N.M., New Ulm, Minn., Gardner, Mass., North Conway, N.H., Tyler, TX, Santa Fe, N.M., Chama, N.M., and Manitou Springs, Colo.

Goins said a registered sex offender has 10 days to verify their arrival in the state of New Mexico. After that they are supposed to prove they have lived in the state for 10 days.

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The first indication Priel had arrived in Gallup was when his name showed up on the GMCS meeting sign-in sheet, and also when he attended the new teacher orientation for the district.

After MCSO received word of Priel's attendance at GMCS functions and reached out to his place of employment, Priel came in to the sheriff's office Aug. 8 to register.

According to the police report, Priel said he had not come in to register despite being in town for several weeks, because he did not have a permanent residence, and his new employment was keeping him busy. He added he had to come register after receiving a directive from his boss.

However, the sheriff's office still filed a failure to comply notice with Priel, because he had not immediately come into MCSO to verify he was living and employed in Gallup.

"He knows his requirements," Goins said. "It turns out he was on probation in Colorado."

Goins said she called Priel's probation officer when she got back into the office Aug. 15. Probation Officer Brandy Caldwell was shocked to learn Priel was in Gallup, and said Priel had not been approved to leave the state of Colorado.

"The probation officer can get a warrant if [the sex offender] violates probation, an extraditable warrant," Goins said.

Goins received the warrant Aug. 19, and Bates and a team of investigators and patrol officers went to arrest Priel at the hotel where he was staying.

Priel had quit his publication job Aug. 16, and will be extradited back to Colorado to face charges for violating probation, Goins said.

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The *Sun* attempted to reach the publication in question to ask whether Priel's charges were unnoticed or unknown, but received no response by press time.

WHAT OFFENDERS CAN DO LEGALLY

Goins said she receives a number of calls from members of the public who ask why sex offenders are allowed to be employed at a specific business or attend public functions such as a high school basketball game or church event.

While there are restrictions the offender has to follow while on probation or parole, Goins said it is ultimately the employer's prerogative to hire the offender in New Mexico.

"There is no state law that says they can't be hired for being registered sex offenders," she said.

Goins said a privately-owned business like the local publications are able to legally hire whomever they want.

After verifying the status of a sex offender, Goins said the sheriff's office must then verify their employment status with the employer, and then periodically verify both their employment and residence.

These visits are done with no prior warning, Goins added.

As for limitations, Goins said a sex offender under probation cannot live within 1,000 feet of a school. She said MCSO is also required to notify the local schools when updates to probation and parole statuses come in.

But there will also be cases in which a convicted sex offender serves their full sentence and is

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not under probation or parole. Under those circumstances, they do not have those limitations, Bates said.

Goins added registered sex offenders are legally allowed to come to local schools in cases in which they are not under probation or parole.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Goins said there are a number of steps a member of the public can take if they suspect someone may be a sex offender, as well as find information on local offenders.

The first step is to use OffenderWatch, the software used by McKinley County to verify local registered sex offenders. OffenderWatch can be viewed at http://www.communitynotification.com/cap_main.php?office=55312.

Site visitors can also choose to be alerted through email when new sex offenders are registered nearby.

Goins also mentioned the sex offender registries operated by the Navajo Nation (<https://navajo.nsopw.gov/>) and Pueblo of Zuni (<https://zuni.nsopw.gov/>).

“All these other entities have to register [the offender] if they live in McKinley County,” Goins said.

Residents can also use the Sex Offender Registration and Tracking Unit by calling (505) 722-8514 or emailing either jugoins@co.mckinley.nm.us or mcsosor@co.mckinley.nm.us for more information, or to report someone.

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Goins also stressed the phone number has 24/7 public access.

The other number to call for info or assistance is McKinley County Sheriff's Office at (505) 863-1410.

"We rely heavily on the public to verify these offenders," Goins said.