

METRO

Accused Coach Has Record of Sex Abuse

Suspect Was on Probation When Hired

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Reginald Robinson Jr., the part-time coach accused of fondling two students from a Northeast Washington middle school, worked for the D.C. school system despite pleading guilty to a sex offense involving a minor two years ago.

Robinson, who was arrested Monday on a charge of second-degree child sexual assault, was on probation from the earlier case while employed at Ronald H. Brown Middle School. His name also was posted on an online listing of sex offenders kept by the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

Theodore Tuckson, acting director of security for the D.C. school system, said it was unclear yesterday how thoroughly Robinson's background had been checked when he was hired as a basketball and track coach at the school.

Tuckson said records indicate that Robinson began work at Brown in late 2001 -- after he pleaded guilty in February 2001 to a third-degree sex offense involving a 14-year-old girl in Prince George's County. News of the earlier case was first reported by WTTG-TV (Channel 5). Robinson's name was posted on the online registry in May 2001.

Yesterday, officials circulated a memo reminding D.C. schools that all staff members who come into contact with children are required to have criminal background checks before beginning work.

"I'm outraged by this," said D.C. Council member Kevin P. Chavous (D-Ward 7), who represents the area around the school, in the 4800 block of Meade Street NE. "We're going to make sure that the school system lays out for the public in a transparent form what they're doing to address this and to guarantee that it can't happen again."

Tony Bullock, a spokesman for Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D), said that "this issue really calls into question the hiring procedures" used by the school system. According to charging documents made public yesterday, Robinson, 35, improperly touched two girls -- 13 and 14 -- in separate incidents last month. One incident allegedly occurred in the school gym and the other in Robinson's car.

Robinson appeared in D.C. Superior Court yesterday and was ordered jailed without bond pending a preliminary hearing Tuesday. His attorney, Maribeth Raffinan, entered a plea of not guilty on his behalf.

Tuckson said he did not have a complete work history for Robinson. He said Robinson also might have coached at the Fletcher-Johnson Educational Center in Southeast Washington. One school source said that assignment might have begun as early as 1994.

Before starting at Brown, Robinson might have submitted paperwork from the D.C. police showing that he had a clean record in the District, Tuckson said. He said he did not think Robinson was fingerprinted.

Robinson received three years of probation in the Prince George's case. Details of the case were unavailable yesterday. According to charging documents filed in D.C. Superior Court, Robinson offered a ride Jan. 21 to the 14-year-old girl, who was walking home from school. The girl refused the ride at first, but relented after Robinson said it was too cold for her to walk, the documents said. In the car, the documents say, Robinson put his hands between the girl's clothed legs, then put his hands back after she pushed them away. Robinson also allegedly reached down the back of the girl's shirt. The second offense allegedly took place two days later. The documents say Robinson approached a girl who was dribbling a basketball in the gym and fondled her, despite her attempts to stop him.

Court paperwork said Robinson lives with his wife and two children in Fort Washington. In addition to his work as a coach, he is a barber.

He is the second staff member at Brown to be charged with sexual assault in recent years. In 1999, gym teacher Calvin S. Kinney pleaded guilty to having sex with two 14-year-old girls, one of them a learning-disabled student who later bore his child.

D.C. schools have been criticized in the past for doing spotty background checks. In 1995, the D.C. auditor found that numerous school employees had criminal records, despite a policy adopted in 1988 requiring background checks before hiring.

D.C. Superintendent Paul L. Vance and officials at Brown Middle School did not return messages left for them yesterday.