

maryland news

School aided ex-con group

Convicted killer accused of student sex abuse; Teacher got job despite record; State may look into hiring at private facilities

By **ANDREW A. GREEN**

SUN STAFF

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The Baltimore private school where a convicted murderer had taught until being charged with sexually abusing three students was part of a city task force working to improve employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

The principal of the Community Initiatives Academy in East Baltimore, Christina V. Philips Holtsclaw, said she believes ex-convicts, especially young African-American men like the fired teacher, need second chances. But she said she had not hired any other employees with criminal records at the school and would not do so again.



"I would not take that chance again with the school," she said yesterday. "Other places, perhaps yes. But not at the school."

Child-welfare advocates and legislators said yesterday that the incident is evidence that the state may need to more closely regulate hiring at private schools.

There, administrators are required to conduct background checks on job applicants but, unlike in public schools, are not prevented from hiring people who have been convicted of violent crimes.

The teacher, Charles Carroll, 28, was arrested Thursday night and charged with raping a 13-year-old girl and sexually abusing two other girls, 13 and 17, according to court documents.

In 1995, he was convicted of second-degree murder after fatally shooting a man in 1994 during a fight.

Holtsclaw confirmed that the school participated in the Baltimore City Ex-offender Task Force, a group organized by the mayor's office to help provide services for ex-convicts who seek employment and re-entry into the community. Members included philanthropic foundations, community-based non-profits, churches and government agencies, but the Community Initiatives Academy was the only school that participated, according to a list on the task force Web site.

Holtsclaw, a former Baltimore County special education teacher, founded the academy in 1981 as an offshoot of the East Baltimore Deliverance Church, of which she is a leader.

She said Carroll did not come to her through her involvement with the task force but that he had been working with children in the community as a tutor before applying at the school, which has 100 students and serves children from day care through 12th grade.

Holtsclaw said Carroll was forthcoming about his conviction, which she confirmed through a criminal background check. She said she believed he acted in self-defense and was not a risk to children at the school because he had turned his life around in the years since the conviction. She did not tell parents about his past.

"This was second-degree murder. ... It wasn't something where he was a murderer out there killing people," Holtsclaw said. "As a black man, I gave him a second chance. I'm not glad for what happened. I'm sorry. But at the same time, I don't think my judgment was wrong at the time."

Ellen Mugmon, a longtime children's advocate in Maryland, said any judgment that puts children, a vulnerable population, at risk is inherently wrong.

"Their priority is to serve to educate children and protect them, or should be," Mugmon said yesterday. "It seems that their priority has been to protect the school, the administration and this particular individual."

Glendora C. Hughes, chairwoman of the board of Maryland New Directions, a Baltimore nonprofit group that runs an ex-offender employment program for women, said it's laudable that the school would try to help an ex-convict. But she said the way the school did it lacked common sense.

Thousands of ex-convicts attempt each year to re-enter the community after serving their sentences, and it's important that they be able to find jobs and support their families, Hughes said. However, a school has to be more careful than a business, she said.

"You're in charge and have the responsibility for people's children, and you at a minimum should give them notice of who's teaching their kids," Hughes said. "It's not just your risk."

Holtsclaw said she heard rumors of the assaults a week before she fired Carroll but did not report them to the authorities. She said she wanted to gather more information and believed reporting the accounts was unnecessary because the mother of one girl already had talked to the police.

Maryland is one of four states that do not have penalties for failure to report child abuse, Mugmon said.

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