

Joshua Carrier sentenced to 70 years to life for molestations

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A former Colorado Springs police officer convicted in what a judge called an “unprecedented” string of sexual abuses at Horace Mann Middle School was sentenced Friday to 70 years to life in prison.

“It stops here,” went one mother’s reaction to the sentence imposed against Joshua Dwayne Carrier. “He won’t do it to anyone else.”

Clad in an orange jail jumpsuit, with tousled hair and a dark goatee, the 31-year-old Carrier accepted his penalty in silence at a roughly two-hour sentencing hearing packed with victims’ relatives and supporters.

In a statement that led one accuser to brand Carrier a “coward,” attorney Christopher Decker told the court his client is “reluctantly required to acknowledge the convictions,” but does not acknowledge guilt.

The sentence was imposed by 4th Judicial District Judge David A. Gilbert, capping a bitter legal saga that included two lengthy trials last year and more than \$10 million worth of civil settlements to be paid to victims and their families by Colorado Springs School District 11 and the city of Colorado Springs.

The school district and city won’t say how much they paid to settle claims they were negligent in allowing abuse to continue, even after some parents lodged complaints about Carrier’s nude examinations of their children.

Convicted of abusing 18 of 22 child accusers, the seven-year police veteran had faced up to hundreds of years behind bars.

Though some with ties to the case complained Carrier got off easy, it’s far from certain he will live to see his release.

Under Colorado Department of Corrections policy, sex offenders with indeterminate sentences must serve at least 75 percent of their penalty before they are eligible for parole, said prisons spokeswoman Adrienne Jacobson.

“It’s possible that he’ll earn time in prison and that some of that may be subtracted from the sentence,” said 4th Judicial District Attorney’s spokeswoman Lee Richards, summarizing Colorado’s complex sentencing provisions for sex offenders. Carrier can be held beyond the 70 years, up to his natural life, until the prison system deems him to be rehabilitated.

Sentence was imposed after emotional appeals by parents who described their children's heartache and humiliation through two trials — one that ended in April with a hung jury, the other in October with guilty verdicts on more than 100 counts involving sex offenses.

To the many of the victims, Carrier was as much a friend and confidant as he was an authority figure, parents said.

"These kids trusted Carrier completely. He groomed them to do that. He groomed all of us," said a mother who addressed court.

The abuses — which Judge Gilbert called "unprecedented" in his 13 years as a judge — occurred during the 2010-2011 school year, when then-officer Carrier coached wrestling and served as an all-purpose volunteer.

Student wrestlers were groped, stroked and in some cases videotaped in the nude under the pretext Carrier was checking them for ringworm and other communicable diseases before competition, testimony showed.

A jury rejected claims that Carrier also groped three boys during drug searches, and Judge Gilbert tossed charges related to a fourth boy whose hazy memory of particulars led to changing testimony.

Said one father in his address to the court: "Short and sweet, Joshua took something from my son he'll never get back: The trust. The security."

In a statement read in a quavering voice, one woman said her son had attempted suicide and was twice hospitalized because of depression. She said she later sold her house and quit her job because of painful associations with Carrier, who had become a role model for the boy in his out-of-state father's absence.

When all that failed to allay the emotional fallout, the boy asked to be put on a plane so that he could live with his father, "far, far away," she said.

Prosecutor Amy Fitch, who won the convictions against Carrier alongside prosecutor Jennifer Viehman, requested the maximum sentence, saying that more than one boy had reported suicidal thoughts.

Others blamed themselves, and questioned their own sexuality, said Fitch, whose thunderous closing arguments at Carrier's two trials reduced many in court to tears.

"These children have not finished processing what Joshua Carrier has done to them," she told the court.

In a heavy German accent, Carrier's grandmother, Christel Luy, who is close to 90, praised her grandson's character and said he had been wrongfully convicted. Most in the gallery listened

respectfully, saving their pique for the family pastor, Sid Huston of Colorado Springs, who said allegations were “very exaggerated” and suggested children “were groomed to be able to testify” against Carrier.

“He’s absolutely ridiculous, and it terrifies me because my son was sitting right there,” one mother said in reaction.

Her son flagged Huston’s comment suggesting that anyone who’s “followed a pop-up on his computer” could find himself in Carrier’s position. “I thought a lot of what he said was hilarious.”

The boy’s mood hardened when asked about Carrier. “I hope he rots in prison.”

Asked how to repair trust in the wake of Carrier’s deceptions, his mother said: “I don’t think there’s anything right now I can say to change that. It’s just a process that we work through every day.”

Said another teenage victim: “Seventy years is a long time. I think it’s earned.”

In handing down the sentence, Judge Gilbert said evidence was “clear” that Carrier was out for sexual gratification but that the abuse appeared to be crimes of opportunity, rather than the result of a “Machiavellian” scheme.

Gilbert turned philosophical in addressing the children, telling them he hopes they understand they shared no blame in their abuse. With Carrier’s badge and unquestioned authority, it’s only natural they didn’t recognize they were being “used,” Gilbert said.

“This was not about them. It was about who he wanted them to be. ... They were just objects in the imagination of this man.”

The judge added: “If I have trouble getting my head around this, what about the kids?”

Carrier will receive 489 days of credit for time served. He must reappear in court within 90 days to address restitution.

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REVAMP'D: Inaugural Exhibition at Ivywild School 8:00 am - Ivywild School
Curious Palate Tasting Class - Surprise n' Secret Spirits 5:30 pm - Soirée
Charles Bunnell: Rocky Mountain Modern 7:00 pm - Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center
Tech N9ne 7:00 pm - The Black Sheep R&R Military Jam 7:00 pm - Stargazers Theater

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