

CMPD officer and wife charged in sexual assaults

charlotteobserver.com

2014

A woman who claimed she was sexually assaulted by a police officer and his wife as a child had reached out to family and church members for help but was told to not go forward with the abuse claims, police said Wednesday.

Officer Reginald K. Harris, 52, a 26-year veteran of the department, was charged Wednesday with three counts each of first-degree sex offense, taking indecent liberties with a minor and crimes against nature.

The victim, a relative of the Harrises, reported the claims to police in 2009, but she initially recanted. She approached authorities for a second time last month, police said.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police say Harris' wife, Dia, 40, was complicit in the crimes and facilitated them. She was charged with three counts each of felony child abuse, taking indecent liberties with a minor, crimes against nature and first-degree sex offense.

The Harrises were in Mecklenburg jail Wednesday evening. Reginald Harris had a bond of \$90,000. Dia Harris' bond was set at \$120,000. Both are scheduled to make their first court appearance Thursday afternoon.

Reginald Harris is on unpaid administrative leave as the criminal and internal investigations move forward.

Police have not released the victim's name or said how she was related to the Harrises, who have several children. The victim was 8 years old when the first alleged sexual assault took place in 1999.

She confided in adult family members and church members about the abuse, said CMPD Deputy Chief Kerr Putney, but was encouraged to not report the crimes.

"At a young age, 8, 9 years old, our victim was reaching out for help to adults in various institutions ... and all of those institutions failed our victim," Putney said. "You had family members, you had people within church institutions who were reached out to, most of which encouraged the victim not to move forward."

Putney wouldn't identify the church institutions or say which members the victim spoke to.

He said investigators stopped just short of charging some of those people with obstruction of justice.

The woman told police that the assaults continued until 2002, Putney said.

In 2009, he said, the victim told police about the alleged sexual assaults.

A police report obtained by the Observer said the 2009 assault allegation was made by Synphaine Williams-Boyce, who works for Mecklenburg Youth and Family Services. She declined to comment Wednesday. The alleged crimes on the report were forcible fondling and indecent liberties with a child. The victim was listed as a 10-year-old girl.

Officers began a criminal investigation and an internal investigation, but the victim became uncooperative, Putney said. Lacking probable cause, both investigations were closed and Harris remained on the police force.

But Putney said the allegations stained Harris' reputation in the department.

"Anytime you're investigated for anything, people are going to look at you differently," Putney said. "And our scrutiny is going to be intensified. We investigate people for a living, and if there's any smoke we're going to be all over it."

Harris, for example, was never assigned to a post where he'd have direct contact with children. Police say the alleged abuse was contained to the family and investigators don't think there are additional victims.

Anne Pfeiffer, executive director of Pat's Place, which conducts forensic interviews of child abuse victims, said it's difficult for children to report abuse because in most cases, assailants are people the child knows.

"They don't want to get someone in trouble, the family situation can be changed, and they could be threatened because a family member could go away," Pfeiffer said. "Different children will tell at different times. Some may tell as soon as it happens. Some may live with it."

Putney said family members dissuaded the victim from reporting the crime because of worries that Harris would go to jail or lose his job.

Veteran officer

Harris, who was known by his nickname "Rock," was hired in January 1988. He was mostly a patrol officer, although Putney said he did a brief stint in investigations. He was most recently assigned to the North Tryon Division and had an annual salary of \$70,967, according to city records.

A search of court records showed he had never been charged with a crime in North Carolina. His most serious offense: a speeding ticket in 1985.

He married Dia Danielle Hairston on June 19, 2004, according to Mecklenburg County records. It was the second marriage for both.

She had a criminal record. In 1996, she was convicted following an assault with a deadly weapon. She was sentenced to community service and probation, and was required to complete a program for people who commit domestic violence.

There's evidence that the Harrises had financial problems. As a couple, they owed the Internal Revenue Service nearly \$20,000. Reginald Harris owed \$139,707 in federal taxes and \$41,584 in state taxes by himself. The IRS had filed a tax lien against the couple in 2010.

Police Chief Rodney Monroe said in a statement that the accusations against Reginald Harris are "deplorable."

"Officers with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department are expected to conduct themselves to the highest professional standards and will be held accountable when they fail to do so," he said. "At no time will this department allow behavior that violates the public's trust."

CMPD urges anyone with more information about the case or any other incidents to call Youth Crimes Detective Brandy Lingle at 704-432-3427.

Other accusations

Harris is the second Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police officer to be criminally accused of sexual misconduct in six months.

On Feb. 19, Officer Thomas E. Allen was charged with four counts of secretly using a camera to view another's body or undergarments, and four counts of possessing the photographs. He took photos – including the illicit ones – as part of his job for the youth Explorers program.

Allen pleaded guilty in July to secretly taking photos of girls' underwear as they participated in a youth police program.

Former CMPD officer Marcus Jackson was arrested in December 2009 after two women told police he'd sexually assaulted them during traffic stops.

A year later, Jackson pleaded guilty to more than a dozen sex-related charges in connection with assaults on six women. He was sentenced to about two years in prison and released in May 2012. Staff researcher Maria David and staff writer Joe Marusak contributed.

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