

When police officers are the sexual predators

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2015 cops as sexual predators

By Colbert I. King

D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department has asked members of the public to call its Youth Investigations Division if they have information on Darrell Best, the 45-year-old police officer accused this week of sexually abusing two teenage girls. Best, who lives in Upper Marlboro, was held without bond after a court hearing Thursday. The MPD, I kindly suggest, may wish to direct the plea for information to officers within its own ranks. Apparently, Best's worst side may have been displayed well before December, when he allegedly assaulted a then-17-year-old at police headquarters and a 16-year-old who attended his church. Yes, you read correctly, his church.

Best, who has been on administrative leave since his arrest Monday, is also a pastor who preaches at God-A Second Chance Ministry in Southeast.

Officer Best was once Sgt. Best. He held that rank until 2009, according to both a retired and a currently senior MPD official. They say he was demoted following a department Disciplinary Review Board decision sustaining a sexual harassment complaint filed by a 5th District officer. Additionally, in 2007, prosecutors said during Thursday's hearing, a 20-year-old female cadet reported that Best inappropriately touched and kissed her at the police academy, where Best was assigned at the time.

What is it with some cops and girls?

Last July, another veteran D.C. officer, 46-year-old Wendel Palmer, was sentenced to 18 years in prison for repeatedly sexually assaulting a 10-year-old girl from 2004 to 2006. She sang in the youth choir at the Southeast church where Palmer served as the choir director.

Then there's Linwood Barnhill Jr., the 24-year D.C. cop who pleaded guilty last year to forcing underage girls to work as prostitutes out of his Southeast apartment. He was sentenced to seven years in prison.

And let's not forget Marc Washington, the 7th District officer found dead in the Washington Channel from an apparent suicide after he was arrested in a child sex case in 2013. Washington stood accused of taking partially nude pictures of a 15-year-old girl, allegedly while wearing his police uniform and saying he was following police "procedure."

There isn't much worse than police officers who use their badges to take advantage of some of the most vulnerable citizens whom they are recruited, trained and sworn to protect.

But the damage they cause extends beyond their immediate victims.

Consider the impact in the community, and particularly on children, when police officers don't follow the law. Officers who are unfit to wear the badge not only affect the reputation and morale of their fellow department members but also undermine public confidence in the entire force.

That's a confidence, I might add, that was shaken all the more by the disturbing story last week in The Post about an 11-year-old girl whose reports of being raped in her Northwest neighborhood were met with only "sporadic" police attention and ended with her being charged with filing a false report — despite medical evidence that she was, in fact, assaulted.

This part of the story jumped off the page and grabbed me by the throat: "But after Danielle reported the rapes, the police interviewed her in a manner that violated guidelines for handling child sexual assault cases, records and interviews show. They delayed analyzing evidence — and then analyzed only some of it. An officer misled her to get her to contradict her account, and then had her charged with lying, according to police reports. And many officers treated her with extreme skepticism; in one internal e-mail, a lieutenant called her 'promiscuous' and the 'sex' consensual.

"Yet Danielle was just 11 years old, well under the age of consent, which is 16 in the District."

Now it pays to keep stories such as these in context. The D.C. police department has about 4,000 members. These bad-news stories shouldn't trigger charges of widespread corruption. But neither should they simply get dismissed as isolated incidents and no cause for alarm. Sexual violence against adolescent and teenage girls by perpetrators who turn out to be cops is outrageous and intolerable.

Exploitation of an underage girl in, of all places, the police headquarters?

Any officer who would do that deserves a special place in hell. If Best is guilty, that's where the chief and the city should send him.

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