

# Rapes stir outrage that felons were near kids

## Two accused of sex with girls during community service

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The Courier-Journal

An indictment of two state inmates for having sex with two girls at the California Community Center has raised questions about whether felons should be allowed to perform community service that puts them in contact with juveniles.

Kentucky law only prohibits felons convicted of sex offenses from working with juveniles. But the commander of the Louisville-Jefferson County Crimes Against Children Unit said the law needs to be expanded to exclude anyone convicted of any felony or of even a misdemeanor sex crime.

Capt. Lewis Sharber said he'll work with the Jefferson County Crime Commission to draft legislation for consideration by the General Assembly when it meets in January. "I'd say it would be a good policy not to have any convicted felons working with juveniles," Sharber said.

City of Louisville rules prohibit people ordered by courts to perform community service from working at community centers, and the city is investigating why that policy was violated, said Mary Russell, a spokesman for Mayor Jerry Abramson. The policy was imposed by Metro Parks' assistant director Charles Hardnett on June 11.

A Jefferson County grand jury indicted William Johnson, 25, and Antonio Lamont Brown, 29, last week on charges of third-degree rape. Brown also was charged with second-degree rape.

Both were at Dismas Charities Diersen,

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**"There are huge risks" in letting felons deal with children.**

Prosecutor  
John Balliet

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1218 W. Oak St., a halfway house that houses inmates convicted of non-violent crimes who are within 18 months of completing their sentences or making parole.

Brown, of Jefferson County, was convicted in 1992 of burglary, receiving stolen property, bail jumping and being a persistent felon; he was sentenced to 15 years and had been at six prisons before being transferred to Dismas in November 1996. Johnson, of Franklin County, was convicted in August 1996 of possession and trafficking in a controlled substance and sentenced to six years in prison. He was at the Blackburn Correctional Complex for a short time before being transferred to Dismas in February.

Johnson is accused of having sex with a 14-year-old girl between June 15 and July 1, after meeting her while he and Brown were working as janitors at California Community Center.

On July 4, Johnson had sex again with the 14-year-old and Brown had sex with a 12-year-old, the indictment alleges.

Russell said the city is trying to determine who was responsible for violating the city's policy against court-ordered community service at community centers. The mayor's office learned about the incident yesterday after inquiries from The Courier-Journal.

The director of Dismas Charities Diersen, Robert Lanning, said employees at the community center had approached Dismas about providing two inmates as janitors.

Diersen learned about the incidents in mid-July when the mother of one of the girls called to report them, Lanning said. He said the organization immediately decided to remove inmates from any community service in which they had contact with juveniles.

Brown and Johnson were transferred to the Luther Lockett Correctional Complex in Oldham County; they haven't entered pleas yet on the statutory rape charges.

Statewide, about 460 felons are housed in nine halfway houses, and about 80 percent of them do some kind of community service, said Mike Bradley, spokesman for the Kentucky Corrections Department. But he said a very small percentage ever come in direct contact with children and that none do currently, although not because of any policy prohibiting it.

He declined to comment on whether the law should be amended to prohibit even felons convicted of non-violent crimes from doing community service that brings them in contact with children.

Kim Allen, the executive director of the Louisville and Jefferson County Crime Commission, said that a legislative work group is studying the issue.

Bradley said inmates performing community service — such as mowing lawns and picking up litter — provide about \$1 million worth of free labor each month, based on the minimum wage. "They continue to provide a very valuable source of free labor," he said.

Debra Miller, the executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, said she has some concerns about casting too broad a net in barring all felons from working with children. For instance, she said she couldn't say whether a person convicted of embezzling money should be disqualified from doing so.

Still, she said: "We can't be too careful with the folks we have working with our children. And maybe a felony conviction — any felony conviction — is where we should draw the line."

Regardless of the law, anyone who

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works with with children needs to be closely supervised, she said.

John Balliet, the assistant commonwealth's attorney who is prosecuting the case, said that while he thinks felons convicted of non-violent crimes should be given the chance to become a useful members of society again, he's not sure that that chance should involve children.

"There are huge risks in letting someone convicted of a felony deal with children. This is an extreme example."

Balliet suggested that the only appropriate contact might be one in which a felon urges children not to do what they've done. "I have a hard

time imagining a good scenario involving a young teen-ager and a convicted felon," he said.

Sharber and Lanning said they weren't aware of any previous incident in which a felon doing community service had committed a crime against children they encountered on the job.

Noting that neither Brown nor Johnson had a history of sexual offenses, Lanning said, "We were dealing with people who don't have a history of such behavior." But he said Dismas Charities decided to keep all felons away from children because "we don't want something like this to happen again."

Bob Yates, a spokesman for Dismas Charities, said the agency learned of the incident on July 14 from a supervisor at the community center who was contacted by a mother of one of the girls. On the same day, Dismas notified the state's Probation and Parole Department, as well as Crimes Against Children. Brown and Johnson were pulled from the center and arrested on July 15.

Lanning said inmates who perform community service are supervised and subject to surprise visits by Dismas employees; he said that was the case at California Community Center.

Brown and Johnson also worked with children served by Kids Cafe,

which offers meals to needy children at the center, Lanning said.

Brown and Johnson began working with the community center's Metro Parks day camp in mid-June. On the day the rapes allegedly occurred, the camp was not in session, but the girls went to the center anyway, Detective Bob Knoop said.

Brown and Johnson are scheduled to appear in Jefferson Circuit Court for a pretrial hearing Dec. 4. A trial is scheduled for Feb. 4.

Second-degree rape carries a sentence of five to 10 years in prison, third-degree rape a sentence of one to five years.



A Jefferson County grand jury indicted felons William Johnson, 25, left, and Antonio Lamont Brown, 29, last week on charges of third-degree rape. Brown also was charged with second-degree rape. Johnson is accused of having sex with a 14-year-old girl, and Brown is accused of having sex with a 12-year-old girl.