

John Carroll students allegedly received sexually explicit messages on social media

By Catholic Review Staff

Four female students at The John Carroll School in Bel Air have come forward since Sept. 17, saying they received sexually explicit messages from someone through social media, according to school officials.

This comes days after Baltimore County Police began investigating a case involving two students at St. Paul's School for Girls in Brooklandville, ages 15 and 17, who reported they received sexually explicit materials from someone through social media, said Elise Armacost, a Baltimore County Police spokeswoman.

During a Sept. 17 assembly at John Carroll, the school's dean of students discussed the St. Paul's incident with students and reminded them of John Carroll's social media policy, according to school officials.

In a Sept. 17 letter to parents, Madelyn Ball, John Carroll's principal, wrote "Teaching children to communicate safely via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Vine, etc. is an ongoing process here, and I am certain that you are equally concerned at home. Please talk with your children about this tonight and have them check their social media sites to see if any of the screen names above appear."

The Harford County Sheriff's Office is not involved with the case concerning the John Carroll students, according to a Harford County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman. A spokesperson from the Bel Air police department did not immediately return calls for comment.

Baltimore County Police are not currently working with police in Harford County since the John Carroll students have come forward, said Armacost, who noted the investigation in Baltimore County is open and ongoing.

It has been widely reported that the individual is believed to have four online user names: J.P. Smith, Brian Pond, JPL42 and MatLax.

Police do not know if the person who allegedly sent the sexually explicit messages to the St. Paul's students is male or female, Armacost said.

According to multiple news reports, St. Paul's has reported that more than 50 of its students were also contacted by the individual.

“We teach our kids not to let strangers in the front door,” Armacost told the Catholic Review, “yet many parents do not provide guidance about not letting strangers into your social media life. If you receive a request from someone you do not know, you should not accept it.”

Students at other Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, including Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson and The Catholic High School of Baltimore, have not reported they’ve been contacted by the individual.

Notre Dame sent a letter to parents Sept. 14 and on Sept. 18 hosted a speaker who discussed digital safety with students and parents.

In an effort to be proactive, Catholic High sent a letter to parents Sept. 17 and plans to host a speaker Oct. 2 to also discuss digital safety with students and parents.

Some students at Maryvale Preparatory School in Brooklandville reported that they received “friend” requests from the individual but have not accepted the request.

In a letter to parents Sept. 16, Tracey Ford, president of Maryvale Preparatory School in Brooklandville, wrote “This situation serves as the perfect reminder to speak frankly, openly and often with your children regarding the dangers that can result from contact with unknown sources through social media.”

Tips from Catholic educators to keep children safe on social media:

- Parents are urged to “friend” or “follow” their children on social media sites
- Children who have “friended” J.P. Smith, Brian Pond, JPL42 or MatLax should “unfriend” and block any future communication attempts from that user
- Do not accept social media requests from anyone you do not know
- Limit time on social networks
- Check privacy settings

- Exercise caution when initiating or accepting “friend requests”
- Inform parents or adults at school if you have been contacted by this user or receive suspicious “friend” requests

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