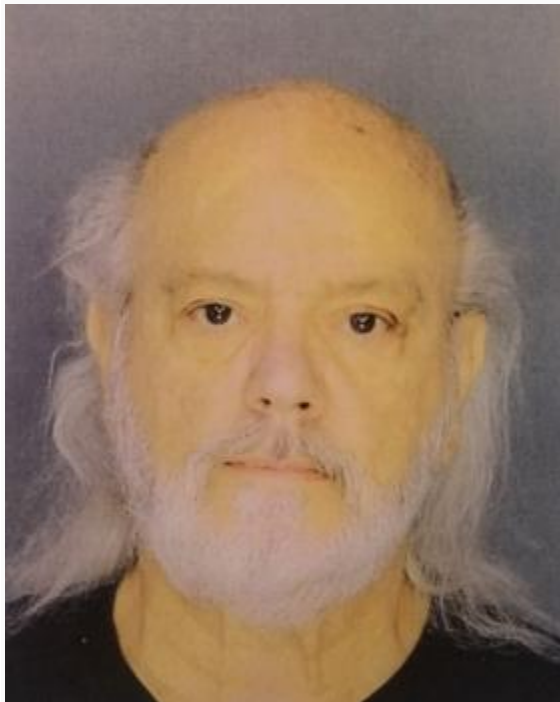


Former bus driver charged with 558 counts for ‘up skirt’ videos

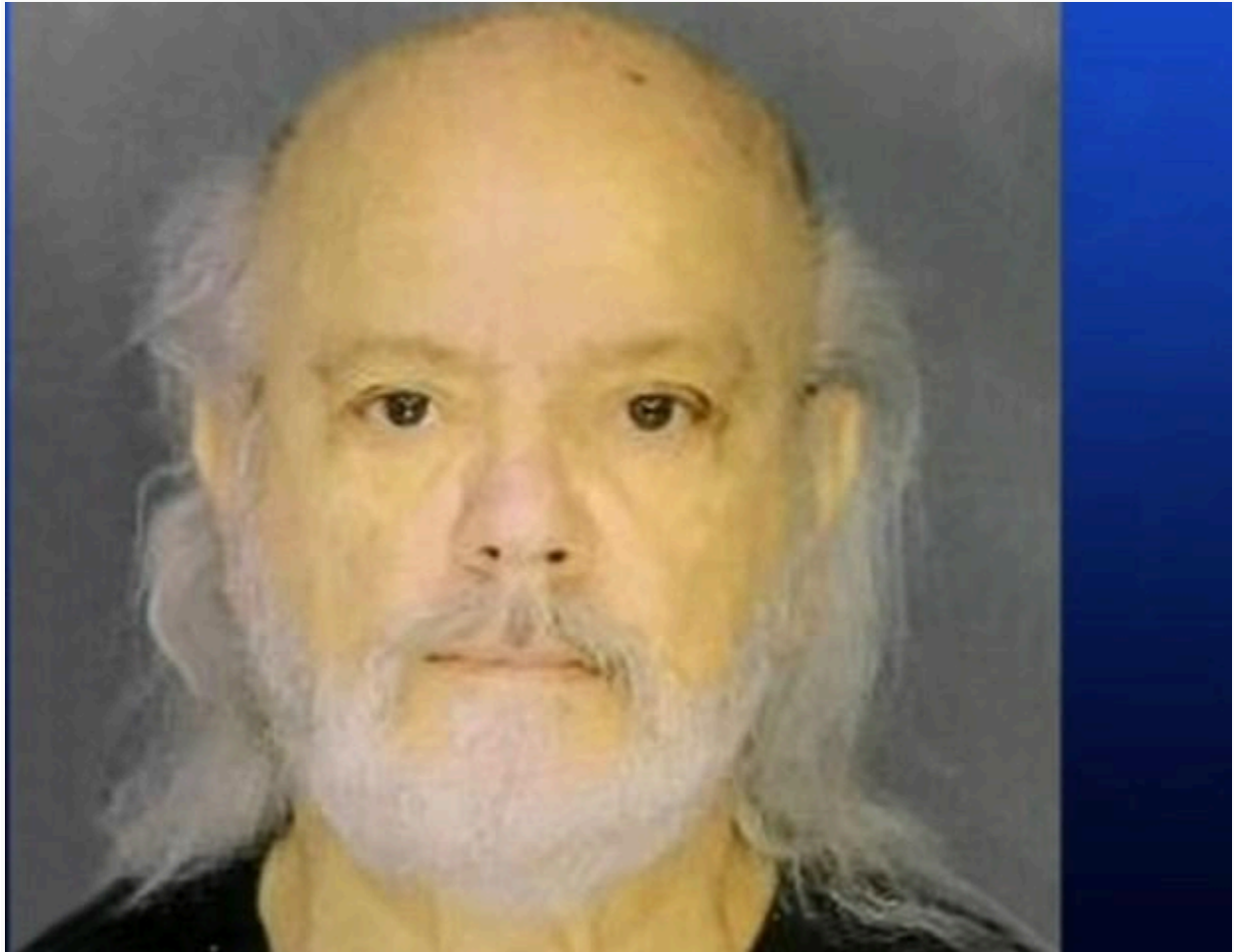
Apologized through attorney Friday; says he is “worthy of redemption”



Bruce Stanley Garner

By **ALEX ROSE** | arose@delcotimes.com | The Delaware County Daily Times

PUBLISHED: May 20, 2022 at 8:29 p.m. | UPDATED: May 20, 2022 at 8:31 p.m.



UPPER PROVIDENCE – A former Marple Newtown School District bus driver was charged with hundreds of counts Friday for allegedly surreptitiously taking “up skirt” videos of young St. Mary Magdalen School students he was transporting.

Bruce Stanley Garner, 70, of the 100 block of West Plumstead Avenue in Lansdowne, is charged with 139 counts each of sexual abuse of children, unlawful contact with a minor, invasion of privacy and criminal use of a communication facility, as well as one count each of endangering the welfare of children and possessing an instrument of crime.

“The unspeakable actions of Bruce Garner were an invasion of the teenage victims’ privacy and an attack on their innocence,” said Upper Providence Police Chief Dave Montella at a press conference Friday morning announcing the charges.

Montella said there is no evidence that Garner ever had any physical contact with any of the eight alleged victim students identified to date, whose ages range from 9 to 14 years old, according to an affidavit of probable cause for Garner’s arrest written by Upper Providence Detective Sgt. George L. Moore.

Moore says in the affidavit that one of the alleged victims and her mother alerted authorities to Garner’s behavior Monday afternoon and spoke with Cpl. Michael Habel. The 14-year-old girl, a student at St. Mary Magdalen School in Media, reported that she believed Garner had been recording her for some time using his iPhone as she entered and exited the bus.

While getting off the bus Monday, the student allegedly captured her own phone video of Garner holding his iPhone down next to his seat with the camera facing outward. Moore said he reviewed this video Tuesday, which allegedly depicts Garner sitting in the driver’s seat of the bus with his arm “fully extended towards the floor, holding the cellular phone with the camera side out and angled upwards.”

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Moore also interviewed the 14-year-old with her mother. The girl said she and two other juvenile females had felt uncomfortable around Garner for some time, who she said only ever engages with the girls and never the boys.

The alleged victim said this usually happens when the girls are wearing their traditional Catholic school uniforms, which include a skirt. In the video shot by the girl Monday, Moore said Garner can be heard discussing upcoming lacrosse playoffs with the 14-year-old, according to the affidavit.

“Through the course of getting on and off the bus, they realized that more frequently he was holding the phone by his side and they just felt that that was unusual,” said Moore. “They never observed him talking on the phone while he was driving the bus or anything like that, but as they were entering and exiting the bus they ... became suspicious of it and were able to bring that to their parents attention, which led them to bring it to the school district’s attention, which ultimately got the police involved.”

Investigators secured a search warrant for Garner’s phone Tuesday, which was executed Wednesday morning as he arrived for work, the affidavit says. Garner provided his six-digit pin to unlock the iPhone and agreed to be interviewed, according to the affidavit.

During the course of that interview, Garner allegedly admitted to recording the 14-year-old and two other juvenile females, who he identified by name as two other St. Mary Magdalen students. Garner told Moore he would hold the phone down next to his seat as the students entered and exited the bus, and that he would capture

the alleged victims “upper legs and buttocks areas” using the built-in camera, according to the affidavit.

When asked for a time period of when this occurred, Garner allegedly said he shot the videos during the school year. He could not be certain how many videos he had allegedly taken, but stated he had done it “more than once, that’s for certain,” according to the affidavit.

A forensic analysis of the phone revealed that 139 such videos of the victims’ “vaginal and buttock areas” had been shot, according to the affidavit, which corresponds with the number of charges.

“During some of the videos, Garner engages the child/victims in conversation in an effort to slow them down or have them stop in the area of his camera, helping him to capture better images of the child/victims pubic area,” the affidavit says.

“This man was a bus driver that they all knew by name and they had contact with every single day,” said county District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer. “He purposely befriended them and their families so he could get them engaged in conversation to allow him to do these heinous acts.”

Montella said Garner was removed as a bus driver after the allegations surfaced and he had not driven a bus since Monday. Tuesday was a school holiday due to the election. Garner was arrested Friday morning at his home and preliminarily

arraigned on all charges. He was remanded to the county jail after failing to post 10% of \$250,000 bail, Montella said. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for June 10.

“Our focus moving forward is twofold,” said Montella. “First and foremost, we will work with school officials and county advocates to provide whatever services the victims need, and we will be by their side throughout the process. Second, we will continue to pursue any and all leads pertaining to this ongoing investigation.”

It was unknown Friday if additional devices may be seized for further analysis, but Stollsteimer said there is no evidence as yet that Garner shared any of the alleged recordings online.

Stollsteimer said some of the alleged victims had known Garner for years. He said the defendant “groomed” those young girls by befriending them and their families so they would feel more trusting toward him, then exploited that trust by allegedly taking the videos.

“(Garner) preyed on these young women that he befriended on that bus in his employment, and I think everyone in the St. Mary’s Parish should know first and foremost that these young women who came forward are absolute heroes,” said Stollsteimer. “It takes a lot of bravery to come forward and to make allegations about somebody who is a trusted person in your life. ... They have stopped other people from being victimized, other young girls, because they came forward.”

“Bruce wants to apologize to the students, their parents and the school district,” said defense attorney Emmett Madden in an emailed statement Friday. “He understands the seriousness of these allegations, and the trust he violated. He is entering mental health treatment on his own accord. He is a 70-year-old father and husband, who has never been in any trouble. He is remorseful for his actions and committed to proving that he is worthy of redemption.”

Stollsteimer said that in the modern world of ubiquitous cellphones, it is imperative that parents talk to their children about the potential of being surreptitiously recorded so that they can recognize the signs and report it to adults, as happened here.

Montella thanked Deputy District Attorney Kristen Kemp, head of the Special Victims Unit, who assisted with the investigation, as well as Delco Criminal Investigation Division Chief James Nolan and CID detectives who helped with the forensic analysis of Garner’s phone.

Stollsteimer and Montella also commended Moore’s work to quickly secure a search warrant before Garner could set foot in a bus again and in placing him under arrest before the week was out.

Montella said Garner had been a bus driver for the district since 2015 and had no prior arrests. Though he drove students for both Marple Newtown district and the parish, Montella said all of the alleged victims are St. Mary Magdalen’s students. He added that investigators are continuing to look into Garner’s employment history.

“Quite frankly, we are going to take this investigation anywhere the leads may take us, whether it’s here or in another county or whatever, but we absolutely will stay on top of this,” Montella said.

While the majority of Marple Newtown buses are equipped with camera systems, the one Garner drove was an older model and did not have a camera, said Moore. It was unknown Friday whether Garner had simply been assigned the bus or he had some hand in selecting it, Moore said.

Marple Newtown School District Superintendent Tina Kane alerted families of the incident Wednesday morning and said Garner is no longer employed by the district or allowed on school grounds.

Kane said the welfare and safety of students entrusted to the district’s care are its paramount concerns and it is fully cooperating with the ongoing criminal investigation. Montella also commended the cooperation of the district and St. Mary Magdalene’s as “amazing.”

“The school and the archdiocese will cooperate with (police) in the course of their investigative work,” said Philadelphia Archdiocese Chief of Communications Kenneth Gavin in a statement Friday. “The safety and welfare of the young people attending our schools is our top priority. All reports of alleged misconduct are taken seriously and are reported appropriately.”

Anyone with additional information on the case is urged to contact Moore at 610-566-8445.