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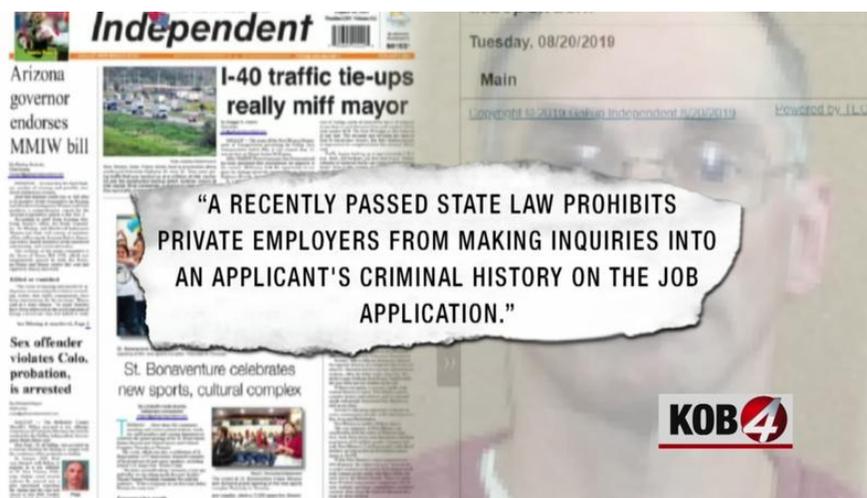
Kai Porter

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A New Mexico newspaper hired a convicted sex offender to report on local schools.

The Gallup Independent reported on the situation, citing a new state law that bans employers from asking about criminal history on job applications.

Guy Priel, 53, was convicted of sexually assaulting a child in 1993, and possessing child pornography in 2007.



Priel was hired by the Gallup Independent as a news editor and education reporter on July 17th.

The Diocese of Gallup sent out a letter to staff and priests Tuesday, alerting them about Priel's job and status as a convicted sex offender, saying he visited Sacred Heart Catholic School for a story last week.

"The staff is not at fault," said Diocese of Gallup Communications Director Suzanne Hammons. "They had no idea he was a convicted sex offender and they followed procedures. So he was buzzed in, you can't just come into the school, you have to be buzzed in. He was observed the entirety of his visit."

The Gallup Independent reported on the incident, saying Priel failed to inform the paper of his status as a sex offender.

The paper pointed to a recently passed state law that prohibits private employers from asking about criminal history on a job application.

That law, known as the 'ban the box' bill, was passed by legislators during the last session and signed into law by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. It bans private employers from asking about an applicant's arrest or conviction history on the initial job application.

State Senator Bill O'Neill, (D-District 13) co-sponsored the bill.

"In no way does it affect an employer's responsibility to look into criminal history," said O'Neill. "I'm just surprised that ban the box is being brought into this."

O'Neill says the law does not ban employers from doing background checks and asking about a criminal record after reviewing the application.

"I'm saddened by this situation but in no way does our bill relate to what happened down there in Gallup," he said.

The newspaper reports that when staff learned of Priel's history August 7th, they required him to register and started moving him off the education beat. But Priel resigned Monday.

He was later arrested on a probation violation warrant.

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