

How Moms for Liberty and a notorious English teacher exploited a high school student

JUDD LEGUM

NOV 13, 2023

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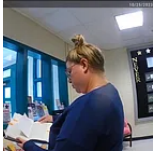
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Vicki Baggett, an English teacher in Escambia County, speaks at a meeting of the Santa Rosa County School Board on September 7, 2023

On October 25, as Popular Information previously [reported](#), two members of Moms for Liberty went to the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office in Florida and accused public school librarians of felonies, alleging they were distributing pornography to minors. The basis of the complaint was the popular young adult novel *Storm and Fury*.

Tom Gurski, one of the Moms for Liberty members, said the book was checked out of Jay High School "by a 17-year-old, which is important because she is a minor." Gurski and the other Moms for Liberty member, school board candidate Jennifer Tapley, brought the Jay High School library's copy of *Storm and Fury* to the Sheriff's Office, with the offending passages marked with orange sticky notes.



Moms for Liberty members call the cops on Florida librarians

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When the deputy sheriff asked how the pair had obtained the book, Gurski and Tapley were coy. They confirmed *Storm and Fury* was not checked out by their own children or a student they knew personally. The real story of how *Storm and Fury* made its way to the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office shows the lengths that Moms for Liberty and its allies will go to persecute public school librarians.

On November 9, WEAR, Pensacola's ABC News affiliate, ran [a segment](#) on the *Storm and Fury* controversy, which featured an interview with the mother of the 17-year-old student who checked out the book from Jay High School. "I'm very angry that my daughter was used to do someone else's dirty work," said the mother, who was not identified by name. According to the mother, neither she nor her daughter were informed that *Storm and Fury* would be turned over to the police, and everything was done "without...permission." The mother said *Storm and Fury* "has never been read by my daughter," and Moms for Liberty "should not use children that they are supposedly trying to protect."

According to WEAR, Gurski told its reporter that "a teacher asked the student to check out the book [and] that teacher then gave the book to a member of Moms for Liberty, who gave it to Gurski." A spokesperson for Santa Rosa County School District told Popular Information that "the request for the student to check the book out was from a 'teacher' who is neither a teacher at Jay High School nor in Santa Rosa County."

A source familiar with the matter told Popular Information that the teacher who requested the 17-year-old student to check out *Storm and Fury* was Vicki Baggett, who teaches English in neighboring Escambia County. Baggett is [notorious](#) for challenging hundreds of books in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties; many of those books discuss racial discrimination or include LGBTQ characters. Popular Information [reported](#) in January that several of Baggett's current and former students at Northview High School allege that she "openly promoted racist and homophobic beliefs in class."

For example, four former students — including three who spoke to Popular Information on the record — [recalled](#) an incident during class where Baggett claimed that "it is a sin for races to mix together and that whites are meant to be with whites and blacks are meant to be with blacks."



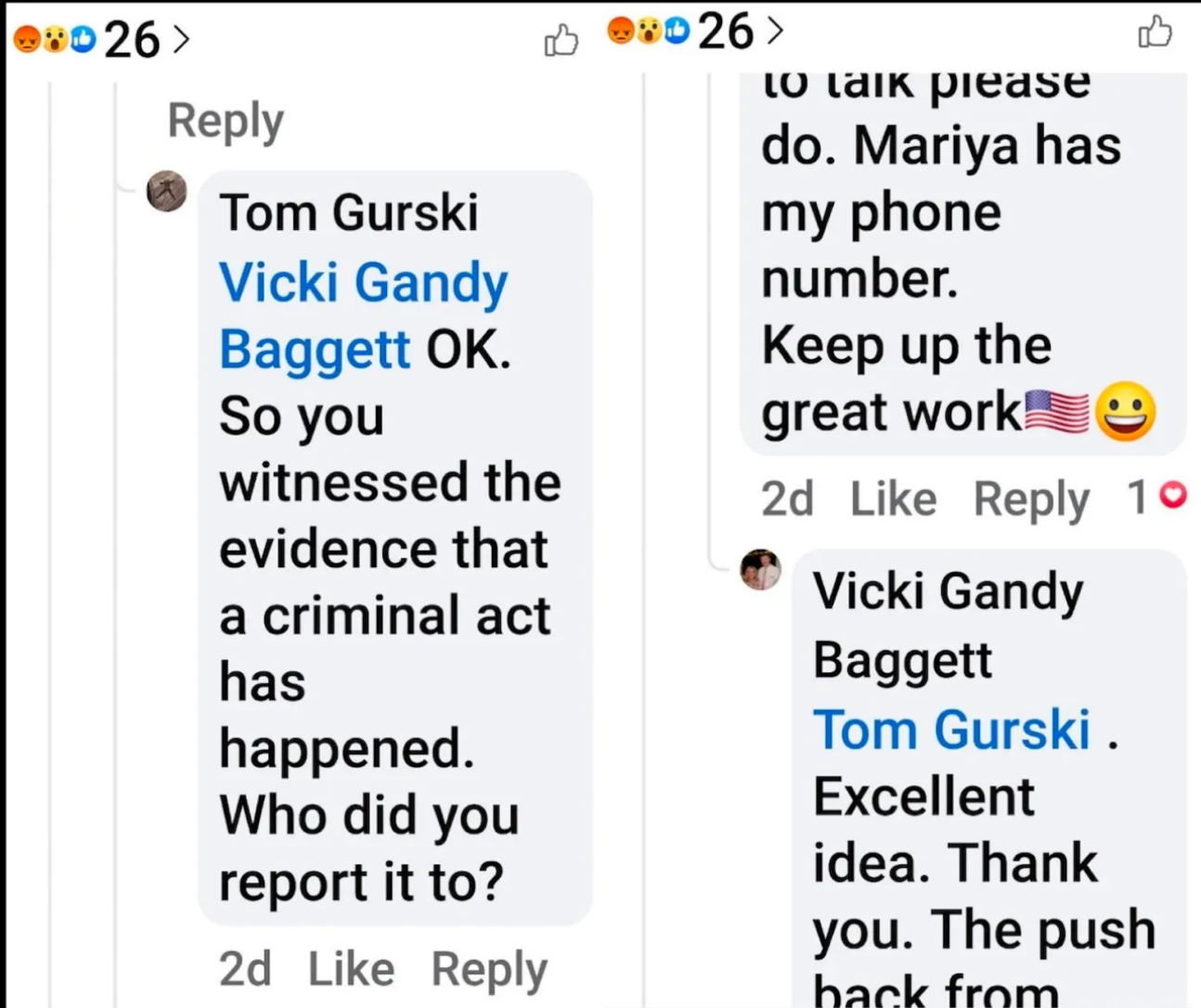
Florida English teacher pushing book bans is openly racist and homophobic, students allege

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Popular Information has obtained screenshots from the private Santa Rosa County Moms for Liberty [Facebook group](#). In messages sent to the group at the start of the school year, Gurski and Baggett discuss filing reports with law enforcement about public library books.

Santa Rosa County Moms For Liberty Private Facebook Group (September 2023)



Baggett has successfully convinced Escambia County School District, where she teaches, to remove most of the books she believes are "pornographic" or otherwise inappropriate. As a result, Escambia County is now [facing a federal lawsuit](#), alleging that the school board's actions violate the United States Constitution. The lawsuit alleges that the school board banned and restricted books "based on their disagreement with the ideas expressed in those books." In so doing, the school board

has "prescribed an orthodoxy of opinion that violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments."

Public records obtained by Popular Information reveal that, for months, Baggett has engaged in an aggressive campaign to pressure Santa Rosa County schools to follow suit. Baggett did not respond to a request for comment.

Baggett's relentless campaign for book censorship

The Florida Freedom to Read Project requested recent correspondence between Baggett and Santa Rosa County schools. In response, the organization received hundreds of pages of emails and other documents, which the group shared with Popular Information. The records reveal that Baggett engaged in a relentless and frequently hostile effort to force Santa Rosa County to remove books from school libraries. The emails also show Baggett [coordinating directly](#) with Mariya Calkins, the Chairwoman of the Santa Rosa County Chapter of Moms for Liberty.

On April 25, 2023, Baggett, using her official Escambia County School District account, emailed Ruth Witter, Santa Rosa County's head librarian, and asked for a list of books that were currently being challenged in Santa Rosa County. Baggett also advised Witter to simply remove any book she had challenged in Escambia County to avoid "some major challenges." A few days later, when Witter responded that no books had been challenged in Santa Rosa County, Baggett asked Witter if Santa Rosa had "closed down your libraries to clean out some of the books."

On June 13, 2023, Baggett sent an email from her Escambia County School District account to Witter and Karen Barber, Santa Rosa County's superintendent, copying Governor Ron DeSantis (R) and Education Commissioner Manny Diaz (R). In the email, she accused Witter of violating the state's pornography laws because there was a Stephen King novel in Santa Rosa school libraries.

Vicki Baggett email (June 13, 2023)

From: Baggett, Vicki [REDACTED]@ecsdfi.us>
Sent: Tuesday, June 13, 2023 1:57 PM
To: Witter, Ruth A.; Barber, Karen R.; Peden, Scott T.; Sanborn, Linda K.; Hewey, Elizabeth A.; Boston, Carol N.; Elliott, Charles W.; GovernorRon.Desantis@eog.myflorida.com;mannydiaz@fldoe.org
Subject: (EXT) IT by Stephen King

CAUTION!!! This Message originated OUTSIDE the district. CAUTION!!!

Ms. Whitter and Board Members:

I cannot believe how many books I am finding in Santa Rosa County school libraries in direct violation of 847.012, especially after being led to believe there were none (Ms. Whitter's previous email to me.)

I know there are people filling out your forms for reconsideration, but actually, as you are aware, the burden is now on you to be in compliance by July 1. Like my county of Escambia, you have your work cut out for you. We all have the same goals of protecting our children from inappropriate content. Here is one below I found just this morning. It is in your county too. This is Stephen King's "IT," which is listed at Milton High and Navarre High in your county. Do you really think minors should have access to this? The law says "no." Please stand up for our children. It is your duty.

Thanks, Vicki Baggett



Baggett soon began submitting numerous requests for books to be removed from Santa Rosa County schools, always copying DeSantis and other state officials. Baggett ran into an issue when she was informed over the summer that, since she is not a resident of Santa Rosa County, she is not permitted to challenge books in the county's

public school libraries.

Baggett did not accept the county's rule but instead spent weeks arguing with the school board's attorney, Terry Harmon, about how to apply school board policy. In an August 11 email to Harmon, again copying DeSantis and many others, Baggett said the Santa Rosa County School district's "attempt to silence me... is unspeakable." She said that she was "saddened and shocked you are more interested in making me go away than protecting the minds, hearts, and eyes of the minor children with whom you have been entrusted." She informed Harmon that she would ignore the school board's rules and continue to submit challenges to books in Santa Rosa County anyway, claiming she was entitled to do so under "STATE authority." She also said that she is "certain my requests will be considered and perhaps even welcomed, since this board and its superintendent are 100% liable for anything made available to minor children, even in the library."

In a September 22 email, Baggett warned Witter and other school officials of "potential felonies from the public regarding sexually inappropriate material in the schools."

On October 13, Baggett obtained a power of attorney from a county parent to submit book challenges on her behalf. The document, signed by Sharon Regan, declares that Regan has "personally seen [books] listed as available in our Santa Rosa School District [that] contain, in my opinion, utter pornography." Regan also declares that "it is clearly a CRIMINAL ACT to make these books and media available to Children or to expose Children to their heinously violent or pornographic content."

The document grants Baggett "retroactive to June 1, 2023, and thereafter" the ability "to determine, in her absolute discretion, Inappropriate Material and to file forms of challenges on my behalf." It also grants Baggett the ability to speak on Regan's behalf at board meetings and "Send and Reply to any and all correspondence or communications with the school district in my name."

Vicki Baggett power of attorney (October 13, 2023)

POWER OF ATTORNEY

I, SHARON DELENE REGAN, DECLARE on my oath that I am a homeowner and resident of Santa Rosa County and reside at my home address above. I firmly believe that no child under the age of eighteen ("Child", "Children") should ever be exposed to pornography, and that certain books and media¹ that I have personally seen listed as available in our Santa Rosa School District contain, in my opinion, utter pornography. I hold an accredited B.A. in English Literature, Composition and History, and a doctorate in Law in addition to a specialty M.B.A. In my opinion, it is clearly a CRIMINAL ACT to make these books and media available to Children or to expose Children to their heinously violent or pornographic content.

EFFECTIVE retroactive to June 1, 2023 and thereafter, MRS. VICKI BAGGETT, M.A.T., a professional educator and resident of Escambia County, Florida, has been constituted and appointed as my true and lawful attorney-in-fact, to speak and act for me and in my name, in the following ways:

- (1) To determine, in her absolute discretion, Inappropriate Materials and to file forms of challenge on my behalf, to read materials in full if required, and to defend the material challenges for me; [SR]
- (2) To Speak with my voice in my place and stead as my designee, alter ego, representative, attorney in fact, agent and as my authorized spokesperson to Superintendent Barber and the School Board of Santa Rosa County and its administrators and employees whenever I would be able to exercise the right to give input to the Board, in respect to Inappropriate Material; [SR]
- (3) To Send and Reply to any and all correspondence or communications with the School District in my name; and to take any other action respecting Inappropriate Material as my attorney-in-fact may deem necessary or proper in the furtherance of my position and intent as expressed herein. [SR]



Baggett sent the document to Santa Rosa County school officials, so there is no "confusion on my ability to submit porno books" for removal.

Last month, Baggett submitted a form seeking to remove *The Almost Moon* by Alice Sebold from a Santa Rosa school library, alleging the book was pornographic. On October 25, the librarian from Milton High School reached out to Baggett and said the first step in the challenge process was to have a meeting at the school to discuss her concerns. Baggett responded that she would not participate in a meeting and warned the librarian of "the legalities that could arise if this book remains accessible to minors."



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110 Comments



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Heidi Dietterich Nov 13

Thank you for digging deep into this. These 'moms for fascism' are disgusting.

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2 replies



Margaret L Nov 13

This is a national tactic. There was a small group of parents pushing to ban several LGBTQ books in my New Jersey high school district a few years ago, and it was absolutely a set up. One of the women's sons supposedly checked out a book that was so "shocking"... but it was one of the books that Fox News was flagging at the time. There is no way that kid just randomly selected the item, his parent definitely created the situation so they would have something to protest. To note, they were unsuccessful.

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3 replies

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