

Southern Poverty Law Center labels NJ parents' rights groups as 'antigovernment'

Gannett

AMANDA OGLESBY, ASBURY PARK PRESS

June 10, 2024 at 5:05 AM

A collection of New Jersey-based parents' rights organizations, including one based in Ocean County, are among ["hate and antigovernment" groups](#) named in the Southern Poverty Law Center's [new report on extremism](#) across the nation.

The Southern Poverty Law Center named the New Jersey Project, New Jersey Parents Involved in Education, as well as six county chapters of Moms for Liberty among its list of extremist and antigovernment groups in the Garden State.

[New Jersey Project](#) opposes the state's sex education curriculum standards and advocates for removing certain books on sex and sexuality from schools and school libraries.

New Jersey Parents Involved in Education is part of a national coalition that aims to "abolish the U.S. Depart. of Education," according to its [Facebook page](#). The national Parents Involved in Education organization opposes teaching about transgender issues, "explicit" sex education and critical race theory, according to its [film website](#).



Protesters at the Feb. 22, 2023 Colts Neck Board of Education meeting, where a proposed transgender policy change was rejected.

Race and sexuality in schools: [Teachers are willing to talk about race, survey finds. LGBTQ issues? Not so much](#)

[Critical race theory](#) is the idea that race and racism impact society. The theory "acknowledges that the legacy of slavery, segregation and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color continue to permeate the social fabric of this nation," according to the [American Bar Association](#).

Moms for Liberty is another parents' rights organization that [advocates](#) for giving parents more control over curriculum and "moral" issues that affect children within public schools. The group opposes transgender children participating in [sports](#), [opposes social emotional learning](#) in schools, and wants critical race theory lessons eliminated.

Of 21 New Jersey groups named as "hate and antigovernment" organizations by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Moms for Liberty's six New Jersey chapters were regarded as "antigovernment" organizations. The six chapters are in Bergen, Burlington, Cape May, Morris, Ocean and Passaic counties.

Moms for Liberty cofounders Tina Descovich and Tiffany Justice pushed back on the SPLC's labeling of their group as extremists.

"The SPLC is nothing more than a mouthpiece for the Biden Administration's repulsion for freedom and parental rights," Descovich and Justice said in a statement. "It is a discredited organization that should not be trusted by the American public.

"Moms for Liberty will remain committed to ensuring that parents around the country have the protection of their fundamental right to direct the upbringing of their child," they said.

Contact information for the Ocean County chapter of Moms for Liberty could not be found on the organization's national website. The [group's Facebook page](#) was either private or had been deleted, but could not be accessed by a reporter.



An audience member holds a sign in support of LGBTQ+ people at a Howell Township Public Schools Board of Education meeting in August of 2023, where the board considered modifying a policy that would affect transgender students in elementary and middle school.

What's in the library? [ALA raises alarm after 2023's top challenged books target mostly LGBTQ, people of color](#)

"In 2023, the SPLC (Southern Poverty Law Center) documented the highest number of active anti-LGBTQ+ and white nationalist groups we have ever recorded," the organization wrote in its [2023 report on hate and extremism](#) in the United States. "These record numbers accompany increases in direct actions against minoritized groups, including hate crimes and other tactics such as anti-Black and antisemitic flyering, protests, and intimidation campaigns targeting LGBTQ+ people, libraries, schools and hospitals."

Over the past year, parents' rights advocates have been behind a number of high-profile school policy campaigns in New Jersey, including a movement to require school officials to [notify parents](#) when a student changes gender identity. New

Jersey's attorney general has said that outing transgender kids to their parents without their consent violates the [rights of LGBTQ+ youth](#).

Related: [Transgender school policies at center of New Jersey legal fight. Here's what we know](#)

In 2023, a [Stockton University poll](#) found that two-thirds of adults believed parents should be more involved in local school curriculum decisions. Of the survey respondents, 66% said that teaching about racism in school was "very important." In addition, 57% of respondents said teaching sex education was "very important."

However fewer adults said it was "very important" to teach about sexuality and gender identity (30%) or gender issues and stereotypes (35%), according to the [poll](#), which was sponsored by the university's William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.

"New Jersey adults support teaching sex education and material about racism and its impact, which have been controversial elsewhere," John Froonjian, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, said at the time of the poll's release. "But the poll shows many in the Garden State still have qualms over teaching about sexual identity and gender norms, especially in the earlier grades."

Thirteen other "[hate and antigovernment](#)" groups are operating in New Jersey, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

- **AC Skins** is an Atlantic City-based "racist skinhead" group, according to the law center.
- **Al Moroccan Empire at New Jersey State Republic** is a sovereign citizens movement whose leader squatted in a Newark home in 2021, according to the law center. [Sovereign citizens movements](#) are various groups of antigovernment activists who do not obey local or national laws, according to the FBI.
- **Garden State 2A Grassroots Organization** is a Mullica Hill-based "antigovernment" group, according to the law center. The organization supported efforts to legalize

carrying guns in public places, including arenas, parks, beaches and stadiums. According to the group's [Facebook page](#), it stopped operating in December 2022.

- **John Birch Society**, which the SPLC describes as "conspiracy propagandists," has active members in New Jersey. The [society's website](#) says American public schools are "failing" and accuses the institutions of "brainwashing students with harmful ideologies."
- **The National Constitutional Coalition of Patriotic Americans** is another "antigovernment" organization with New Jersey members, according to the SPLC. Following the 2018 school shootings in Parkland, Florida, the coalition organized [pro-gun gatherings](#) across the nation, according to NPR.
- **National Justice Party - New Jersey** is an antisemitic, Holocaust-denying, white nationalist group, according to the SPLC.
- **New Jersey European Heritage Society** is an antisemitic, white nationalist organization, according to the SPLC and the [Anti-Defamation League](#).
- **Patriotic Dissent Books** is a statewide neo-Nazi group, according to the SPLC.
- **Proud Boys** are a hate and right-wing extremism group with active members in New Jersey, according to the SPLC and Anti-Defamation League.
- **R.V. Bey Publications** is a Pleasantville-based sovereign citizens movement group, according to the SPLC.
- **S14 National Socialist Youth Detachment** is a statewide neo-Nazi group, according to the law center.
- **Sons of Liberty Survival Outfitters** is a Sparta-based antigovernment organization, according to the SPLC.
- **United Patriots of America** is an anti-immigrant group based in Linden, according to the law center.

Amanda Oglesby is an Ocean County native who covers education and the environment. She has worked for the Press for more than 15 years. Reach her at @OglesbyAPP, aoglesby@gannettnj.com or 732-557-5701.

This article originally appeared on Asbury Park Press: [Southern Poverty Law Center: NJ parents rights' groups are extremists](#)