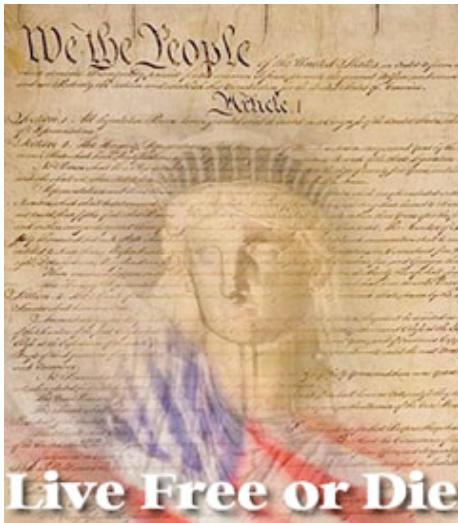


OUR VIEW: School sex scandals are out of control (poll)

[WAYNE LAUGESEN](#)

2011-09-19 19:39:38



Another day, another school sex scandal. A school board member for Ellicott School District 22 has joined the ongoing parade of public school officials and employees throughout the country who stand accused or convicted of sexual improprieties with minors. The public-school sex abuse scandal, by any accounting, dwarfs the most grandiose estimates of abuse in Catholic organizations and other religious institutions in the United States.

It is time for parents to get serious about demanding high screening and ongoing scrutiny of those who work directly with children or represent their interests on boards. Demand all reasonable and legal efforts to ensure that adults who are associated with schools pose no danger to kids.

While the arrest of District 22 board member Stefanie Dickinson should serve as another wake-up call to parents, reminding them of potential dangers, the community should also caution against crucifying Dickinson on the basis of criminal charges alone. Yes, it looks damning when police find a child's phone with sexual texts from an adult.

Yet, until justice runs its course we must respect the fact that suspects are innocent unless and until proved guilty in court — no matter how distasteful the charges. Big charges do not always equal big guilt.

This does not mean life should go on, business as usual, unless and until Dickinson is proved guilty. While we cannot convict with less than proof beyond reasonable doubt, suspicion and criminal charges are enough cause to take reasonable precautions regarding a suspect. Formal notification should alert all parents when a school official or employee has been charged with a serious crime.

Could Dickinson be innocent? Of course. Not all text messages are as they appear.

Cheap and free “spoofing” apps are widely available on the Internet and gaining in popularity. The apps facilitate pranksters in making it appear a call or text came from someone else. If Jan wants Becky's boyfriend, Tom, she can use a spoofing app to send Becky a breakup message that appears to have come from Tom. Spoofing apps are also used to hack into voice mail systems. A 2010 Wall Street Journal video shows a reporter using a spoofing app to hack voice mail effortlessly without a password. The video tells of a belief that Paris Hilton spoof-hacked Lindsay Lohan's phone — a charge Hilton denied. It features Obama Girl explaining how spoof apps can be used to trick boyfriends.

(How often to police arrest innocent people? Let us know in the poll to the right. Must vote to see results. Thanks!)

Low-tech spoofing involves picking up another person's phone and sending a text message that appears to have been written and sent by the owner of the phone. Kids do this stuff, usually for innocent fun.

What motive could someone have to set up Dickinson? Well, she is a controversial politician who is the subject of a recall campaign. Investigators should rule out spoofing in this case, if they haven't already.

We are not saying, by any stretch, that we have reason to suspect Dickinson's innocence. She may have done exactly as accused. We have no idea.

We know only this: Our culture is brilliantly deceptive, as proved by institutional sex scandals and telephone hacking apps. We must question authority, think for ourselves and trust with caution.

Friend editorial page editor [Wayne Laugesen](#) on [Facebook](#), follow him on [Twitter](#)

© Copyright 2011 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.
[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)