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of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
April 2, 2025**

HB0147: UNFAVORABLE

County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy – Established

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Device Use Policy – Established** as a mandate on local school system policy that takes away our ability to make a balanced decision on the use of cell phones in schools.

Many factors go into the development of a local policy regarding the use of personal technology devices by students in school. Teachers and administrators want to ensure that student focus is on instruction and cell phones and/or social media can be a major distraction which impacts that focus. Parents want to have a direct connection with their student in case of emergency or other personal needs. Balancing these perspectives and providing for consistency in the implementation of local policies and procedures ensures all stakeholders are engaged in a way that allows the resulting policy to be carried out with fidelity.

Both the House and Senate have passed differing versions of legislation that would require a policy to limit the use of cell phones by students in schools, including SB0130 and HB0147. While both have narrowed the scope of the original bills, they remain a mandate on local policy. What should be evident from the many variations of the bills similar to HB0147 heard by this Committee is that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to be legislated. For example, the very definition of “personal electronic devices” in each bill differs.

As a growing body of national evidence points to the negative impacts of personal technology devices and social media on youth mental health and the local classroom, the Board has committed to looking for ways to reduce the distraction of cell phones. Through months long processes and deliberations, including staff presentations, stakeholder surveys, and public hearings, on January 30, 2025, the Board [approved adjustments](#) to *Policy 8080 - Responsible Use of Technology, Digital Tools, and Social Media*, and the *Student Code of Conduct* intended to reduce the use of personal devices by students during the student day. The new policy in Howard County will go into effect on March 3, 2025, and will require that student cell phones be away, silent, and not cause distractions in the classrooms, hallways, or lunch room for all students at all levels. Additionally, the Maryland State Department of Education also currently has a workgroup reviewing existing school system policies to make future recommendations.

As a legislative priority, the Board supports local decision making in the development of policy that accounts for a balance of educational practices, available resources, public input, and local accountability. Given potential solutions for Howard County could result in additional costs to the school system – such as phone lockers or pouches – support from funding sources after a local implementation decision is made would be preferred to legislative mandates for a policy.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on HB0147 from this Committee.