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Position: FAV

FAVORABLE
House Bill 147
County Boards of Education – Elementary and Middle Schools – Student
Technology Use Policy

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
April 2, 2025

Lauren Lamb
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 147, which would require county boards of education to develop and adopt a policy limiting the use of a personal electronic device during school hours with certain exceptions for medical, emergency, or educational purposes. It would also require the policy to be published on the county board's website and in student handbooks.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

A recent poll of NEA members showed that 90 percent support school policies prohibiting the use of cell phones during instructional time.¹ Why such overwhelming support? Of those same educators, 83 percent report that students are having difficulty concentrating and completing assignments, trends which experts say correlate with increased access to cell phones.^{2 3} These concerns are not limited to teenagers. Even elementary and

¹ National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

² National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

³ How Phones Ruin Concentration. Child Mind Institute (2024). <https://childmind.org/article/kids-shouldnt-use-phones-during-homework/#:~:text=Multitasking%20leads%20to%20shallower%20thinking,Clinical%20Expert:%20Matthew%20Cruger%2C%20PhD>

middle school students have considerable daily screen time – according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, U.S. children ages 8-12 are using devices or in front of screens for an average of 4-6 hours each day.⁴

It is impractical and often ineffective to enforce restrictions on cell phone usage when policies vary on a classroom-by-classroom basis. Enforcement must not be left up to individual educators; rather, schools need widely observed norms led by system leaders and administrators. We therefore encourage uniform, countywide policies that are crafted in partnership with local bargaining units and include thoughtful exceptions for circumstances like emergency, medical, or educational needs.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 147.

⁴ Screen Time and Children. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2024). https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx

HB0147 Howard Co BOE Testimony 040225 for EEE - Ce

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Position: UNF



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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.

HB0147- State Board- LOI- Crossover.pdf

Uploaded by: Madeline Houck

Position: INFO

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

BILL: House Bill (HB) 147- County Boards of Education - Elementary and Middle Schools - Student Technology Use Policy

DATE: April 02, 2025

POSITION: Letter of Information

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (Department) would like to share the following information regarding **HB 0147**, which would require that local boards of education develop and adopt a policy to prohibit elementary and middle school students from using a cellular device or personal electronic device during school hours. This mandate does not apply to county boards that already have a cell phone use policy in place.

The State Board and the Department appreciate the intent of this bill to prioritize our youngest learners' academic engagement and to limit distractions within their schools and classrooms. We concur that every elementary, middle, and high school should have a clear, consistent, and research-informed policy to guide the use of cell phones in schools.

To that end, we are pleased to share that the Department and State Board have convened the Task Force on Student Cell Phone Use in Schools, scheduled to launch in January 2025. The task force will review current policies across the state on allowable student use of cell phones in schools and develop guidance to support school districts in addressing this issue. The task force consists of teachers, administrators, parents, students, superintendents, and other educational experts across all grade bands, who will collaborate to generate a set of resources for school districts by early spring 2025.

The majority of school districts in the state have updated policies in place that govern the use of cell phones in schools or on school grounds, which are aligned with local codes of discipline and may be differentiated for grade bands. Many school districts designed their policies in partnership with local parents and teachers through the use of surveys, voluntary pilot programs, and other engagement strategies. As the task force convenes, the Department and the State Board will continue to conduct a comprehensive review of existing policies and leverage the expertise of our stakeholders. Throughout this process, we will be sure to include our essential partners in the General Assembly.

We request that the committee consider this information as it deliberates HB 0147. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs, Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0504 or Hannah Oakley, Deputy Director of the State Board, at hannah.oakley@maryland.gov, if you would like any additional information.