

## Chapter 596

**(House Bill 525)**

AN ACT concerning

**County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use  
Policy – Establishment**  
~~**(Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**~~  
***(Joanne C. Benson Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)***

FOR the purpose of requiring each county board of education to develop and implement, not later than a certain school year, a policy ~~limiting~~ prohibiting the use of an electronic communication device by a student during the school day except under certain circumstances; and generally relating to county boards of education and a student electronic communication device use policy.

BY adding to

Article – Education

Section 7–137

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2025 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

**Article – Education****7–137.**

**(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.**

**(2) “ACADEMIC SCHOOL DAY” MEANS ANY STRUCTURED OR UNSTRUCTURED LEARNING EXPERIENCE THAT OCCURS FROM WHEN THE FIRST BELL RINGS AT THE START OF THE SCHOOL DAY UNTIL THE DISMISSAL BELL RINGS AT THE END OF THE SCHOOL DAY, INCLUDING INSTRUCTIONAL PERIODS, LUNCH, RECESS, PASSING PERIODS, AND TRANSITIONAL PERIODS.**

**(3) (1) “ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE” MEANS ANY PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICE CARRIED OR TRANSPORTED BY A STUDENT TO RECEIVE, SEND, OR RECORD VOICE, IMAGE, OR TEXT CONTENT, INCLUDING CELL PHONES, TABLETS, LAPTOPS, SMART WATCHES, WIRELESS EARBUDS OR HEADPHONES, GEOLOCATION DEVICES, AND ANY OTHER DEVICE WITH COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS.**

(II) “ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE” DOES NOT INCLUDE AN ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE PROVIDED BY A COUNTY BOARD FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PURPOSES.

(4) “SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM” MEANS AN INTERNET-BASED APPLICATION, WEBSITE, OR DIGITAL SERVICE THAT ENABLES USERS TO CREATE, SHARE, OR VIEW CONTENT OR TO INTERACT WITH OTHER USERS THROUGH PROFILES, ACCOUNTS, FEEDS, MESSAGING, COMMENTS, REACTIONS, OR SIMILAR SOCIAL FEATURES, AND THAT IS PRIMARILY DESIGNED TO FACILITATE SOCIAL INTERACTION, USER-GENERATED CONTENT, OR CONTENT DISTRIBUTION TO A BROAD OR SEMI-PUBLIC AUDIENCE.

~~(4) (5) “STORE” MEANS TO SECURE IN A MANNER DETERMINED BY THE COUNTY BOARD TO ENSURE THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE IS NOT CARRIED ON THE STUDENT’S PERSON DURING THE ACADEMIC SCHOOL DAY.~~

*(B) THIS SECTION DOES NOT APPLY TO THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND OR THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF.*

~~(B) (C)~~ NOT LATER THAN THE 2027–2028 SCHOOL YEAR, EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A POLICY TO ~~LIMIT~~ PROHIBIT THE USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES BY STUDENTS DURING THE ACADEMIC SCHOOL DAY.

~~(C) (D)~~ EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN SUBSECTION ~~(D) (E)~~ (E) OF THIS SECTION, THE POLICY DEVELOPED UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL:

(1) PROHIBIT A STUDENT FROM USING AN ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE DURING THE ACADEMIC SCHOOL DAY;

(2) REQUIRE A STUDENT TO STORE THE STUDENT’S ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE DURING THE ACADEMIC SCHOOL DAY;

(3) PROHIBIT A STUDENT FROM ~~USING THE SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES DETERMINED BY THE COUNTY BOARD~~ ACCESSING OR USING A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM DURING THE ACADEMIC SCHOOL DAY; AND

(4) REQUIRE ADMINISTRATOR APPROVAL FOR THE USE OF A PERSONAL ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES WHEN A SCHOOL-ISSUED ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE IS UNAVAILABLE.

~~(D)~~ (E) THE POLICY DEVELOPED UNDER THIS SECTION MAY NOT PROHIBIT A STUDENT FROM USING AN ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE:

(1) FOR A STUDENT WITH A DISABILITY, FOR REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS RELATED TO A DISABILITY, INCLUDING FOR ANY PURPOSE DOCUMENTED IN THE STUDENT'S INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM OR 504 PLAN;

(2) TO MONITOR OR ADDRESS A STUDENT'S DOCUMENTED HEALTH ISSUE;

~~(3) DURING AN EMERGENCY EVENT, IF EXPRESSLY AUTHORIZED BY AN ADMINISTRATOR;~~

~~(4) (3) WHEN DIRECTED BY AN ADMINISTRATOR FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES INSTRUCTOR TO BE USED AS PART OF A LESSON;~~

~~(5) (4) (3)~~ TO ACCESS LANGUAGE TRANSLATION TOOLS TO ENSURE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS WHEN SCHOOL-ISSUED ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES ARE NOT AVAILABLE OR SUFFICIENT FOR THIS PURPOSE; OR

~~(6) (5) (4)~~ FOR THE PURPOSE OF MEETING CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES, AS APPROVED BY A PRINCIPAL.

~~(E)~~ (F) EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL:

(1) ENGAGE PARENTS, STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND REVISION OF THE POLICY, INCLUDING DETERMINING ENFORCEMENT OF THE POLICY; AND

(2) PUBLISH AND MAKE THE POLICY AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES IN STUDENT HANDBOOKS, ON THE SCHOOL'S AND COUNTY BOARD'S WEBSITES, AND AT SCHOOL EVENTS.

~~(F)~~ (G) (1) A POLICY DEVELOPED UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL INCLUDE APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINARY MEASURES FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE POLICY.

(2) THE DISCIPLINARY MEASURES ADOPTED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION SHALL BE TIERED DISCIPLINARY MEASURES ENFORCED BY AN ADMINISTRATOR.

(3) A DISCIPLINARY MEASURE ADOPTED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION MAY NOT INCLUDE SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION SOLELY FOR A VIOLATION OF THE POLICY.

~~(G)~~ (H) ON OR BEFORE SEPTEMBER 1, 2027, ~~AND EACH SEPTEMBER 1 UNTIL SEPTEMBER 1, 2032,~~ EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL SUBMIT ~~A REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPACTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION~~ A COPY OF THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICY IN THE LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM IMPLEMENTED UNDER THIS SECTION, INCLUDING:

(1) ~~A COPY OF THE CURRENT ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICY THAT DESCRIBES:~~ DESCRIPTION OF THE POLICY'S:

(I) STORAGE AND SECURITY REQUIREMENTS AND ANY RELATED GRADE-LEVEL DIFFERENTIATIONS ESTABLISHED IN THE POLICY;

(II) ~~GRADE-LEVEL DIFFERENTIATION~~ DISCIPLINE MEASURES AND ANY RELATED GRADE-LEVEL DIFFERENTIATIONS ESTABLISHED IN THE POLICY;

(III) INSTRUCTIONAL USE PROTOCOLS; AND

(IV) EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION PLANS; AND

(2) DOCUMENTATION OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT; IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICY.

~~(3) COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT DATA, INCLUDING:~~

~~(I) RELATED DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS, DISAGGREGATED BY STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS; AND~~

~~(II) THE USE OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AS A DISCIPLINARY MEASURE, IF USED;~~

~~(4) DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPACTS ON THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, IF ANY, INCLUDING SURVEY DATA FROM STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS ON FOCUS, WELL-BEING, AND SATISFACTION FOLLOWING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION;~~

~~(5) EQUITY AND ACCOMMODATION DATA, INCLUDING THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF EXEMPTIONS TO THE POLICY GRANTED BY A SCHOOL; AND~~

~~(6) ANTICIPATED POLICY REVISIONS FOR THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR, IF ANY.~~

~~(H) (I) ON OR BEFORE ~~JULY~~ DECEMBER 1, 2028, ~~AND EACH JULY 1 UNTIL JULY 1, 2033~~, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL PUBLISH ON THE DEPARTMENT'S WEBSITE A REPORT THAT COMPILES ~~AND SUMMARIZES THE REPORTS OF THE COUNTY BOARDS ON THE IMPACTS OF IMPLEMENTING~~ THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICIES OF EACH COUNTY BOARD SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT UNDER SUBSECTION ~~(G)~~ (H) OF THIS SECTION, INCLUDING:~~

~~(1) THE DATA SUBMITTED BY THE COUNTY BOARDS TO THE DEPARTMENT;~~

~~(2) ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES; AND~~

~~(3) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND MODEL POLICIES.~~

~~(J) (J) (1) EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL SEND TO THE DEPARTMENT AN UPDATED COPY OF THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICY DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED UNDER THIS SECTION.~~

~~(2) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL PUBLISH ON ITS WEBSITE A COPY OF EACH COUNTY BOARD'S ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICY SUBMITTED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION.~~

~~(K) (K) (1) ON OR BEFORE JULY 30, 2028, AND EACH JULY 30 UNTIL JULY 30, 2033, EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPACTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE POLICY, INCLUDING:~~

~~(I) COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT DATA, INCLUDING RELATED DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS DISAGGREGATED BY STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS; AND~~

~~(II) EQUITY AND ACCOMMODATION DATA, INCLUDING THE NUMBER AND TYPES OF EXEMPTIONS TO THE POLICY GRANTED BY SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTY.~~

~~(2) THE DEPARTMENT, IN CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS, SHALL DETERMINE THE BEST METHOD TO SUBMIT THE INFORMATION REQUIRED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION TO THE DEPARTMENT, INCLUDING WITHIN EXISTING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.~~

~~(K)~~ (L) **THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ADOPT REGULATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS SECTION.**

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 2026.

**Approved by the Governor, May 26, 2026.**