

Hi, I'm Principal Matt Hornbeck testifying today in strong support of Senate Bill 571, Maryland Kids Code. I've served as principal at Hampstead Hill Academy in Baltimore City for 20 years, so I've seen the rise of social media and the harm it causes our kids. Principals across Baltimore and Maryland and the nation are on the front lines of this fight dealing with the negative impacts of young children and teenagers using cell phones. Just 10 years ago, we did not have the problem we face today. The deck is stacked in favor of the incessant need to feed advertisers with clicks. In many ways it's worse than cigarettes or drugs because a social media addiction - and let's be honest, this is the premeditated drugging of our children - starts at a very early age. It sucks up so much time, and keeps the user wanting more and more. It's not an overstatement to say it can steal a childhood.

Here is the problem as told by principals in high schools and middle schools.

One principal says, "Tomorrow, I will spend a large part of my day surfing through social media posts that led to conflict between students. Students will spend the weekend going back and forth, and then we deal with the aftermath. Teachers say social media the number one distraction in class.

Another says, "It impacts attendance because students are up late at night on their phones, which causes them to be late or absent. Students admit they are on their phones after 2:00 am. It definitely impacts achievement because of the constant distractions during class."

A third principal says, "Social media is a terrible distraction and weighs on young people's mental health. Parents struggle to control its use, and they need help. Parents are not aware of various platforms and identities kids create or get consumed by. Social media makes space for anonymous bullies, who often aren't even students. Most of the negative traffic occurs when they're online at home on their phones. A major problem at high schools is the time it takes away from study habits in the evening."

Finally, another principal points out that "almost every conflict we deal with stems from social media, and it takes so much away from instruction. Kids say very mean things about each other on social media. When the victim of a post or participant is hurt, emotionally or physically, it negatively impacts attendance and student achievement"

Today is very exciting. Our staff and parents are wildly supportive of the courageous stand Senators Kramer, Hester, and West are taking with SB571 and

Delegates Solomon, Wilson, and Love are taking with HB603 to keep our children safe online. As you know, Attorney General Anthony Brown recently joined more than 40 other states and Baltimore City Schools joined dozens of school districts in filing lawsuits to protect our students online. Our future as a City and State is at risk until we get a handle on the impact of social media on our children. Please vote to make SB571 the law in Maryland. Thank you for your time today.