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Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

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Senate Bill 29 – *Education – Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program – Establishment*

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, supports Senate Bill 29, which is legislation aimed at prohibiting the use of cell phones by students during instructional time in Maryland schools.

As the leading voice for physicians and their patients in Maryland, MedChi is deeply committed to promoting policies that support the health and well-being of our youth. This legislation represents a critical step toward fostering an environment that enhances student focus, mental health, and academic achievement. The General Assembly is considering multiple bills on the topic of cell phone use by students this Session, and MedChi feels there is sufficient evidence to support adopting policies prohibiting cell phone use by students on a statewide basis.

The pervasive use of cell phones in classrooms has raised significant concerns among educators, parents, and healthcare professionals. Research consistently demonstrates the detrimental effects of cell phone use during instructional time on both learning outcomes and mental health. A study published in *Educational Psychology* found that students who used mobile devices in class for non-academic purposes scored significantly lower on tests compared to their peers who refrained from such use. The study concluded that cell phone distractions impede the ability to process and retain information, ultimately hindering academic performance (Kuznekoff et al., 2015).

Beyond academic performance, excessive cell phone use has been linked to mental health challenges among young people. According to the American Psychological Association, excessive screen time is associated with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances in adolescents. The constant connectivity facilitated by cell phones can exacerbate feelings of social pressure and cyberbullying, leading to a negative impact on students' emotional well-being (Twenge et al., 2017).

Furthermore, limiting cell phone use during instructional time promotes healthier social interactions and communication skills. A study conducted by the London School of Economics found that banning mobile phones in schools improved test scores, particularly among low-achieving and low-income students, by reducing distractions and leveling the playing field (Beland

& Murphy, 2016). These findings underscore the importance of creating a focused and equitable learning environment for all students.

MedChi also wishes to support the exceptions provided for in this bill, including for student individualized educational programs, for documented health reasons, and for educational purposes.

MedChi supports this legislation as a proactive measure to address these challenges and improve educational and health outcomes for Maryland's youth. By removing the distraction of cell phones during instructional time, we can help students develop stronger cognitive skills, foster healthier social interactions, and protect their mental health.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 29.

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