

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the  
Maryland Senate  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
For the Hearing on  
Education – Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program – Establishment (SB 29)  
January 26, 2025**

**Favorable with Amendments**

Free State PTA represents over 34,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

Free State PTA submits this testimony *as favorable (with Amendment)* of Senate Bill 29 Education – Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program – Establishment. This bill is for the purpose of establishing the Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program; requiring certain local school systems to develop and implement a policy that prohibits student cell phone use during the school day, subject to certain exceptions; and generally relating to the Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program. The purpose of the pilot program is to collect data to determine the effect of local school system policies that limit student use of cell phones during the school day on (Academic Achievement, Student Classroom Engagement, Student Social Interaction, Student Behavior and Discipline). Each eligible school system shall select one Middle and one High school in the county to participate in the pilot program and develop and implement a policy that prohibits student cell phone use during instructional time and establish procedures to enforce the policy including appropriate disciplinary measures for violations. The data collected regarding student cell phone use including (Academic Achievement in the school, Student Classroom engagement, Student Social Interactions (such as Bullying, Cyberbullying and Harassment), Student Behavior and Discipline, Enforcement Challenges, Student, Teacher, Parent/Guardian feedback on the policy. On or before September 1, 2026, each eligible local school system shall submit a report based on the data collected.

Such actions are consistent with our PTA position of working together to help guide our children as they learn about social interactions and positive behaviors. Positive behaviors can promote and lead to better learning outcomes. PTA is in support of Senate Bill 29 with the following Amendments:

**Amendment 1:**

**Current Language:** FOR the purpose of establishing the Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program; requiring certain local school systems to develop and implement a policy that prohibits student cell phone use during the school day, subject to certain exceptions; and generally relating to the Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program.

**Amend to:** FOR the purpose of establishing the Focused Classrooms Pilot Program; requiring certain local school systems to develop and implement a policy that limits student cell phone use during classroom instruction, subject to certain exceptions; and generally relating to the Focused Learning Classrooms Pilot Program.

**Amendment 2:**

**Current Language:** A (3) "Instructional Time: means anytime during the school day, except a student's lunch period.

**Amend to:** A (3) "Instructional Time: means the time when in attendance during the student's designated classroom time as per the student's assigned schedule and does not include lunch, recess or time in between class periods.

**Amendment 3:**

**Current Language:** 4 D (I) Develop and Implement a policy that prohibits student cell phone use during instructional Time; and

**Amend to:** 4 D (I) Develop and Implement a policy **that limits** student cell phone use during instructional Time; and

Students should be given a choice to keep their cell phones on them but have the phones / personal devices muted during instruction time so that they can focus on learning during class. PTA advocates for responsible cell phone use among students, encouraging open conversations between parents and children about digital safety and healthy digital habits through their "PTA Connected" program, which aims to equip families with the knowledge to make informed decisions regarding device usage and screen time, rather than pushing for outright bans on cellphones in school or blanket prohibition. Though we concede that cell phone use can be distracting and unproductive in instructional setting; an outright ban of cell phones is not supported by PTA. The details of the policy should be determined through collaboration with Parents, Teachers and Students and should be updated and re-evaluated periodically. Students should be given the opportunity to learn about appropriate, healthy, thoughtful use of technology such as cell phones. Students should be given a choice how to secure their phones such as in their backpacks, notebooks or lockers or muted; An outright ban (or entirely phone free schools) is not supported by PTA. Locking up or lockdowns should be a last resort and only considered for each individual student when there is a repeated request and failure to follow policy; cell phones in such instances should be only taken away temporarily. The limited use of cell phones should not block students from being able to connect with their families when needed or for health-related or safety-related reasons. Students should be permitted to use of their phones between classes, lunch and other non-instructional times. Teachers should have the autonomy to allow personal device uses for research, learning, organization, study purposes, and positive behavior incentives when appropriate.

Free State PTA speaks up for every child, and while this legislation provides for a cell phone pilot study and data collecting to promote less distractions during instructions, the outright ban of cell phones (or entirely phone free schools) is discouraged by PTA. It is for these reasons above that Free State PTA urges **a favorable (with Amendment)** vote in support of Senate Bill 29 so that County Boards of Education establish proper cell phone policies in collaboration with Parents, Teachers, Students.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of



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