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**TO:** Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**BILL:** Senate Bill (SB) 29 – Education – Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program - Establishment

**DATE:** January 29, 2025

**POSITION:** Letter of Information

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**Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:**

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (Department) would like to share the following information regarding **Senate Bill (SB) 29 – Education – Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program - Establishment**. SB 29 launches a pilot program in Montgomery and Carroll County Public Schools, requiring each district to develop and implement a program in one middle and one high school that prohibits student cell phone use during the school day, subject to certain exceptions. These districts would then be charged with collecting student data on the pilot program's impact and submitting a report to the Department and the Maryland General Assembly.

The State Board and the Department appreciate the intent of this bill to prioritize 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.

While it is important to consider how best to evaluate the efficacy of these pilot programs, it should be noted that the data specified in this bill is robust, wide-ranging, and would require further definition. Further, teachers in the selected schools could potentially face a significant increase in responsibilities related to data collection. Ultimately, while the data compiled and accompanying report could be useful at the school-level, utilizing data from four schools at a statewide level would not be sufficient to yield accurate conclusions.

To support school districts as they design policies to address cell phone challenges, 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 assembled team 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 - including both Carroll and Montgomery County Public Schools - 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, MSDE 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 **SB 29**. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs at [Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov](mailto:Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov) or at 410-767-0504 or Hannah Oakley, Deputy Director of the State Board, at [hannah.oakley@maryland.gov](mailto:hannah.oakley@maryland.gov), if you would like any additional information.