

## **SB0029\_FAV\_MedChi\_Education - Phone-Free Schools P**

Uploaded by: Drew Vetter

Position: FAV



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Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 29, 2025

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

**POSTION: 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.

**For more information call:**

Andrew G. Vetter  
J. Steven Wise  
Danna L. Kauffman  
Christine K. Krone  
410-244-7000

# **SB29PhoneFreeSchools.pdf**

Uploaded by: Justin Ready

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 29, 2025

**SB 29 – Education – Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program - Established**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

SB 29 establishes the Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program in Carroll and Montgomery counties. This program will collect data to determine the effect that of student cell phone use during the school day. The data will focus on academic achievement, student classroom engagement, student social interactions, and student behavior and discipline. Carroll and Montgomery counties will choose one middle school and one high school in the county to participate in the phone-free program.

Instruction time with limited distractions is extremely important to student success, not only academically but also socially. This crucial study could provide data highlighting the impact of student phone use during the school day.

There is no opposition from the local school systems involved. I humbly ask for a favorable report on SB 29.

## **SB29\_MSEA\_Lamb\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lauren Lamb

Position: FAV

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

**Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment**  
**January 29, 2025**

**Lauren Lamb**  
**Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 29, which would establish the Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program, requiring the Carroll County and Montgomery County public school systems to develop and implement a policy that prohibits student cell phone use during the school day, with certain exceptions for health, educational, or emergency circumstances. It would also require the eligible school systems to submit a report on the effectiveness of the Pilot Program.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

A recent poll of NEA members showed that 90 percent support school policies prohibiting the use of cell phones during instructional time.<sup>1</sup> Why such overwhelming support? Of those same educators, 83 percent report that students are having difficulty concentrating and completing assignments, trends which experts say correlate with increased access to cell phones.<sup>2 3</sup> Adolescents are increasingly spending large portions of their days

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<sup>1</sup> National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

<sup>2</sup> National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

<sup>3</sup> How Phones Ruin Concentration. Child Mind Institute (2024). <https://childmind.org/article/kids-shouldnt-use-phones-during-homework/#:~:text=Multitasking%20leads%20to%20shallower%20thinking,Clinical%20Expert:%20Matthew%20Cruger%2C%20PhD>

using phones or other devices: according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, U.S. children ages 8-12 are using devices or in front of screens for an average of 4-6 hours each day, and children over 13 are getting up to 9 hours of screen time each day.<sup>4</sup>

It is impractical and often ineffective to enforce restrictions on cell phone usage when policies vary on a classroom-by-classroom basis. Enforcement must not be left up to individual educators; rather, schools need widely observed norms led by system leaders and administrators.

We appreciate this bill's thoughtful approach to testing model policies and collecting data. The report in this bill is likely to yield useful insights on the benefits and challenges of enforcing cell phone policies, and we urge that those insights are applied in developing uniform, countywide policies that are crafted in partnership with local bargaining units.

**We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 29.**

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<sup>4</sup> Screen Time and Children. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2024). [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx)

## **Written Testimony for SB 29\_ Education - Phone-Fr**

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: FAV

Written Testimony for **SB 29**: Education - Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program  
- Establishment: Please **VOTE YES** on this bill.

Dear EEE Committee:

I love this legislation!!

I know there are multiple Student Cell Phone Use policy bills this legislative session. I agree with any and all of the policies that keep cell phones out of students' hands while they are in school, unless they are being used by students with IEPs or 504s. Since most students are issued Chromebooks, they have no reason to have a cell phone while they are attending school. Cell phones do not enhance a student's learning (with the exception of the students with IEPs or 504s). Quite the opposite, cell phones are a huge distraction that our children do not need while they are attempting to learn. Just look at the vast number of major motor vehicle accidents that occur because a driver is on their cell phone while driving. This shows you that attempting to multi-task while using a cell phone is not advisable and would be an enormous detriment to our students' learning capability.

We need to return our schools to academics first and foremost, and this is a great start to achieving that goal.

Thank you.

Trudy Tibbals  
A Very Concerned Mother and Maryland resident

## **sb29 cellphones v3.pdf**

Uploaded by: Beth Jarrett

Position: FWA

**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



**Gerrod Tyler, President**  
Free State PTA  
president@fspta.org

## **SB 29**

Uploaded by: Ronza Othman

Position: UNF

Subject: Unfavorable: Establishing a Phone-Free Schools Pilot Program

Date: January 29, 2025

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002

[President@nfbmd.org](mailto:President@nfbmd.org)

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to vote against SB 29 as it is currently written. The intention of the bill is laudable, but in reality, it will create more problems than it solves.

The section of the bill that is problematic is “(3) The policy developed under this subsection may not prohibit a student from using a cell phone: (i) for any purpose documented in the student’s Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan”. The student who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan loses the confidentiality of their plan as soon as they use their phone. This confidentiality is an essential and longstanding aspect of these programs. Without it, the student may then be asked inappropriate questions about their disability by their peers. They may even be bullied, or worse, ostracized. This treatment will cause irreparable damage to both the individual student and their family. Persons with disabilities are not obligated to reveal their disability. Certainly, ensuring our students’ focus in school is of utmost importance, but you don’t solve one problem by creating another.

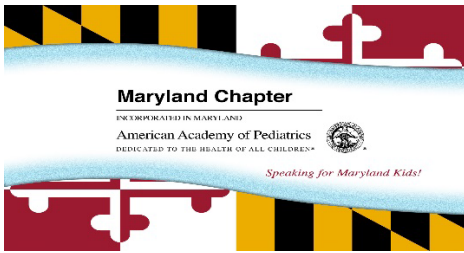
Please vote unfavorable on this bill.

For questions, please contact me at [President@nfbmd.org](mailto:President@nfbmd.org) or at 443-426-4110.

## **SB0029\_LOI\_MDAAP\_Education - Phone-Free Schools Pi**

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: INFO



Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 29, 2025

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

**LETTER OF INFORMATION**

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of information for Senate Bill 29.

As pediatricians, we are deeply committed to promoting the health and well-being of children and adolescents. We know from both research and clinical experience that the use of cell phones in schools presents complex challenges, including impacts on academic focus, mental health, and peer relationships. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has developed a **Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies**, which we encourage this Committee to review as it explores policy solutions. The guide offers evidence-based recommendations on the role of cell phones in schools and strategies for balancing educational needs with the realities of technology in students' lives. The resource can be accessed here: [Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies](#)

We also wish to draw your attention to a specific concern regarding proposed legislation that includes "health" exemptions to school phone use restrictions. While we understand the intent to support students with documented medical conditions, such provisions, if broadly defined, could unintentionally burden pediatricians and other healthcare providers with an influx of appointment requests from families seeking exemptions for their children to retain phone access. This could divert critical time and resources away from other essential healthcare needs. To mitigate this risk, we recommend that any proposed exemptions include clear and specific criteria for medical necessity. We also suggest working collaboratively with schools, healthcare providers, and families to ensure policies are both practical and equitable in implementation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your commitment to the well-being of Maryland's children.

**For more information call:**

Christine K. Krone

J. Steven Wise

Danna L. Kauffman

410-244-7000

## **SB 29- State Board- LOI.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mary Gable

Position: INFO

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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.

# **SB29, 130, 368 Maryland Education Coalition.docx.p**

Uploaded by: Rick Tyler, Jr.-Chair

Position: INFO



# Maryland Education Coalition



Ellie Mitchell & Rick Tyler, Jr. – Co-Chairs

Web site - [www.marylandeducationcoalition.org](http://www.marylandeducationcoalition.org)

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Email - [md.education.coalition@gmail.com](mailto:md.education.coalition@gmail.com)

January 29, 2025

SB 29, SB 130 & SB 368

Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

POSITION - INFORMATIONAL

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) was founded over 40 years ago (1980) and is Maryland's oldest, most experienced, and diverse public education advocacy coalition. MEC advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide for all public school students in Maryland.

The Maryland Education Coalition recognizes that research on best practices for cell phone use in schools is continually evolving. While there is broad agreement on the need to limit young people's screen time and regulate the contexts in which cell phones are used, we believe cell phone policies are most effective when designed and enforced locally by school districts and individual schools.

To ensure these policies are effective and equitable, we recommend that they align with guidance provided by the Maryland State Department of Education and adhere to the following principles:

- 1. Grounded in High-Quality Research**

The latest research should inform policies on child development, education, and technology use.

- 2. Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement**

Cell phone policies should be developed with meaningful input from students, staff, teachers, and families, reflecting the needs and perspectives of those directly impacted.

- 3. Equitable and Non-Punitive Accountability**

Accountability measures for violations should avoid overly punitive consequences. Policies must not result in unnecessary disciplinary actions, including suspension, exclusion, or expulsion, which can disproportionately harm students.

- 4. Support for Diverse Needs**

Policies must accommodate the technology needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. Where cell phones are required or used for services, appropriate accommodations must be provided.

- 5. Flexibility for Exceptions**

Clear guidelines should address when staff and faculty may exercise discretion to allow exceptions, ensuring policies remain practical and context-sensitive.

Ultimately, students deserve a classroom environment that prioritizes focus and learning. Technology rules should reflect the latest research and best practices to support student success while respecting diverse needs and circumstances.