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Prince George's County

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Education, Business and
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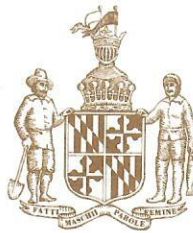
Joint Committees

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Fair Practices and
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson
SB130 Board of Education-Students Cell Phone Device Use Policy Established

Good afternoon, Chair Brian Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan, and members of Education, Energy, and Environment.

I am Senator Joanne C. Benson. I am here to present SB130 County Board of Education-Student Cellular Device Use Policy-Established.

As a Legislator of District 24 and a retired educator of Prince George's County Schools, I am deeply committed to fostering a supportive and effective learning environment for our students. Today, I am here to speak in support of the proposed legislation to ban cell phones in schools. The primary goal of this legislation is to enhance the academic focus, mental health, and overall safety of our students by reducing the distractions and potential harm associated with cell phone use during school hours.

Please Allow Me to Explain Why This Legislation Is Needed.

1. **Enhancing Academic Focus:**
 - Reducing Distractions: Cell phones are a significant source of distraction in the classroom. By limiting their use, we can help students concentrate better on their studies and improve their academic performance.
 - Supporting Teachers: Teachers often struggle to maintain students' attention when cell phones are present. This legislation will empower educators to create a more focused and engaging learning environment.
2. **Promoting Mental Health:**
 - Reducing Anxiety and Depression: Research has shown that excessive cell phone use, particularly on social media, can contribute to increased anxiety and depression among students. By limiting access during school hours, we can help mitigate these mental health issues.
 - Encouraging Social Interaction: Reducing cell phone use encourages students to engage more with their peers and develop essential social skills.
3. **Preventing Cyberbullying:**
 - Minimizing Online Harassment: Cell phones can be used for cyberbullying, which can have severe emotional and psychological effects on students. A ban can help reduce these incidents and create a safer school environment.
4. **Ensuring Safety and Integrity:**
 - Reducing Cheating: Cell phones can be used to cheat on exams and assignments. Banning those helps maintain academic integrity.
 - Managing Emergencies: While some parents may worry about not being able to contact their children, schools can implement policies that allow for emergency communication without disrupting the learning environment.
5. **Supporting Evidence:**
 - Personal Stories: As a retired Principal and Educator, I am very much involved in the schools in Prince George's County Public Schools District 24. I have had numerous conversations with teachers and parents who have shared their concerns about the negative impact of cell phones in the classroom. For example, cyberbullying is a huge concern for the safety of the children. Parents have stated the mentioned behavior has led to emotional distress, social withdrawal, and a decline in academic performance.

Research and Data: Studies have consistently shown that limiting cell phone use in schools leads to better academic outcomes and improved mental health. For instance, a study by Anna Lamb, Harvard Gazette Staff Writer, (March 2023). Stated, in 2020, the National Center of Education Statistics reported that 77 percent of U. S. schools have moved to prohibit cell phones for nonacademic purposes

Comparative Examples: Other states and districts, such as California, have successfully implemented similar bans with positive results. Their experiences can serve as a model for our efforts.

Finally, the proposed cell phone ban legislation is a crucial step towards creating a more focused, healthy, and safe learning environment for our students. Therefore, I urge your favorable vote to support this legislation and help us build a brighter future for our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration,