

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Ways and Means Committee  
For the Hearing on  
County Boards of Education – Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Establishment (HB 57)  
January 26, 2025**

**Favorable with Amendments**

Free State PTA represents over 72,000 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 House Bill 57 – County Boards of Education – Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Establishment. This bill is for the purpose of requiring each county board of education to develop and implement a policy limiting the use of a cellular phone by a student during the school day except under certain circumstances; and generally relating to county boards of education and a student cellular phone use policy.

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 House Bill 57 with the following Amendments:

**Amendment 1:**

**Current Language:** (A) In this section, "Instructional Time" means any time during the school day, except a student's lunch period.

**Amend to:** (A) In this section, "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 2:**

**Current Language:** C (1) Prohibit a student from using a cellular phone during instructional time; and

**Amend to C (1):** Limit the use of cell phones by students during instructional time; and

**Amendment 3:**

**Current Language:** C (2) Require a student to store the student's cellular phone in a secure place during instructional time, including:

- (I) a locker;
- (II) a closed backpack
- (III) a storage container provided by the school.

**Amend to:** C (2) Require a student to mute / silence or keep their cellular phone in a place within the instruction room they are attending during instruction time including:

- (I) a notebook,
- (II) a backpack or purse

The mission of PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by  
engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. Page 1

(III) an unsealed container (such as a pocket chart) provided by the school within the classroom the student is attending.

#### **Amendment 4:**

##### **Current Language:**

(D) The policy developed under this section may not prohibit a student from using a cellular phone:

- (1) For any purpose documented in the student's individualized education program
- (2) To monitor or address a student documented health issue or
- (3) When directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes

##### **Amend to:**

(D) The policy developed under this section may not prohibit a student from using a cellular phone:

- (1) For any purpose documented in the student's individualized education program
- (2) To monitor or address a student documented health issue
- (3) When directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes, such as research, learning, organization, study purposes and positive behavior incentives when appropriate
- (4) From using to connect or keep connected with their families
- (5) When students / families would like to utilize for safety purposes

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. 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 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 policy to promote less distractions during instructions an outright ban of cell phones in schools is discouraged by PTA. It is for these reasons above that Free State PTA urges **a favorable (with Amendment)** in support of House Bill 57 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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