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January 27, 2025

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Bill: House Bill 57 –County Boards of Education – Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Establishment

Position: Support with Amendment

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral-level psychologists throughout the state, is writing in SUPPORT with an amendment of House Bill 57 County Boards of Education – Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Establishment. The bill addresses an important issue in our classrooms today – the highly distracting and disruptive nature of student cell phone use during instructional time. The solutions described in the bill appear to offer a reasonable and practical way to prohibit student cell phone use during instructional time, with appropriate exceptions noted for students with documented disabilities.

Beyond the adverse impact of detracting from the quality of instructional time, however, is the impact that a student's cell phone use can have on their mental health. In many cases the impact can be quite toxic, resulting in increased anxiety and depression for vulnerable students. But at the same time, many students are benefitting from cell phone contact with their therapists while in school, and from the use of self-help apps such as Prosper (<https://www.prosperselfcare.com/>), which is already in use in the high schools of at least three Maryland public school systems. The bill's language allows for an exception to the prohibition if a student has a documented medical issue. For clarity we believe that this exception should cite behavioral health specifically, and we offer the following amendment, on page 2, line 12: "... A STUDENT'S DOCUMENTED BEHAVIORAL OR PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUE; ... "

Thank you for considering our comments on HB 57, with the proposed amendment. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the Chair of MPA's Legislative Committee, Dr. Stephanie Wolf, at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

David Goode-Cross, Ph.D.
David Goode-Cross, Ph.D.
President

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

cc: Richard Bloch, Esq., Counsel for Maryland Psychological Association
Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs