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Economic Matters Committee

Chair
Property and Casualty Insurance
Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building – Room 130
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Chair Atterbeary,

I am writing in favor of HB 57 County Boards of Education – Student Cellular Phone Use Policy – Establishment.

Cell phone use during school hours has become increasingly more disruptive in a student's learning environment. Studies have shown that mobile phones, text messages, and the fear of not having access to one's phone distracts students and impairs their learning.¹ Furthermore, excessive cell phone use can be correlated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness among adolescents.²

A Pew Research Center survey conducted in June of 2024 found that 1 in 3 middle school teachers and nearly 3 in 4 high school teachers call smartphones a major problem.³ Many schools have tried to address this issue by implementing cell phone policies, most often requiring students to turn off their phones during class or hand them to administrators during school hours. According to the Maryland State Department of Education, as of September 2024, 13 states have passed statewide policies restricting cell phone use and 18 of Maryland's 24 local education

¹ Jessica S. Mendoza, Benjamin C. Pody, Seungyeon Lee, Minsung Kim & Ian M. McDonough, *The effect of cellphones on attention and learning: the influences of time, distraction, and nomophobia*, 86 *Computers in Human Behavior* 52 (2018), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0747563218301912>

² *Smartphones, social media, and their impact on Mental Health*. Columbia University Department of Psychiatry. (2024, March 18),

<https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/research/research-areas/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry/sultan-lab-mental-health-informatics/research-areas/smartphones-social-media-and-their-impact-mental-health>

³ Hatfield, J. (2024, June 12). *72% of U.S. high school teachers say cellphone distraction is a major problem in the classroom*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/12/72-percent-of-us-high-school-teachers-say-cellphone-distraction-is-a-major-problem-in-the-classroom/>

agencies (LEAs) have also established new policies concerning phones during instructional time.⁴

HB 57 addresses concerns by requiring each County Board of Education to develop and enforce a policy limiting the use of cellular devices during the school day, with exemptions in certain circumstances. Additionally, this bill would require students to store their cell phones in a secure location during instructional time, whether that be a locker, backpack, or storage container. It is important to note that nothing in this bill prohibits a student from using their cell phone for a purpose documented in the student's individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan. If a student violates this policy, a teacher or administrator shall take necessary disciplinary measures.

In 2023, Florida became the first state to pass a phone ban for K-12 classrooms, prohibiting phone use during class time and disabling access to social media for devices on district Wi-Fi. Students are permitted to use cell phones only for education purposes, when expressed directly by an educator.⁵ Since then, states such as California, Indiana, Virginia, Ohio, and South Carolina have all adopted some form of policy that restrict or ban cell phone use in schools.⁶ In Maryland, cell phone use policies are already in place in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Frederick, Garrett, Prince George's, St. Mary's, and Montgomery Counties among others.⁷ Last year, certain secondary schools in Baltimore County adopted a pilot program where cell phone pouches were installed in every classroom.⁸ This allows parameters to be put in place to restrict cell phone use during instructional time.

Additionally, cell phone usage in schools enables students to record, share, and organize fights online. A New York Times review of more than 400 fight videos from schools in several states found a pattern of middle and high school students exploiting phones and social media to arrange, capture, and spread footage of brutal fighting in school.⁹ This violence has transcended

⁴ Maryland State Department of Education . (2024, September 24). *Background and trends on cell phones in schools*. National and Local Scan of Cell Phone Policies in Schools .
<https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2024/0924/Background-and-Trends-on-Cell-Phones-in-Schools-A.pdf>

⁵ Natasha Singer, Why Schools are Racing to Ban Student Phones, The New York Times (Apr. 2024),
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/11/technology/school-phone-bans-indiana-louisiana.html>

⁶ Katersky , A., & Forrester, M. (2025, January 21). *New York schools may implement cellphone ban*. ABC News.,
<https://abcnews.go.com/US/new-york-schools-implement-cellphone-ban/story?id=117950238#:~:text=Eight%20states%20have%20already%20implemented,according%20to%20The%20Associated%20Press.>

⁷ Bowie, L. (2024, August 14). *More Maryland schools are banning cellphones in classrooms*. The Baltimore Banner.,
<https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/education/k-12-schools/maryland-schools-cellphone-bans-LF3TP5C5KJFYJJXM7O6CTMTUYY/>

⁸ Papst, C. (2024, August 19). *States are banning cellphones in school, here's how Maryland is handling the issue*. WBFF.
<https://foxbaltimore.com/news/project-baltimore/states-are-banning-cellphones-in-school-heres-how-maryland-is-handling-the-issue-baltimore-county-schools-anne-arundel-county-schools-myriam-rogers-mark-bedell>

⁹ Singer, N. (2024, December 15). *An epidemic of vicious school brawls, fueled by student cellphones*. The New York Times., <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/15/technology/school-fight-videos-student-phones.html>

across some of the nation's largest school districts, including Prince George's County and Montgomery County. The suspension rate in Montgomery County public schools rose from 1.3% in 2021-2022 to 1.6% in 2023.¹⁰

Amendments are being considered to include more strict enforcement of this policy and to expand the allowed policy exemptions. An identical bill has been introduced in the Montgomery County Delegation to respond to student cell phone use in schools at the local level.

This bill is intended to strengthen and standardize cell phone use policies among all counties in Maryland to ensure our students are fully engaged with their classmates, teachers, and institution. By providing our children with a phone free environment, they are able to thrive in an institution that promotes classroom discussion and supports mental health.

Respectfully,



Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo

¹⁰ Broom, S. (2024, March 12). Suspensions for fighting in Montgomery County Schools up in most recent year reported.
<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/maryland/suspensions-fighting-montgomery-county-schools/65-20ef7db9-132c-4239-b875-78c06da358d6>