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BILL: HB 147
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Elementary and Middle Schools - Student
Technology Use Policy
DATE: January 23, 2025
POSITION: Oppose
COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents **opposes** House Bill 147.

This bill requires county boards of education to develop and adopt a policy that prohibits elementary and middle school students from using a cellular phone or personal electronic device during school hours. Such policy may not prohibit a student from using a cellular device for any purpose documented in the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 Plan, to monitor or address a student's health issue, or when directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes. This act shall take into effect July 1, 2025.

Maryland superintendents appreciate the good intentions of this bill; however, PSSAM steadfastly opposes any legislation that imposes statewide mandates on local school systems or local boards of education, especially on policies that have previously been deliberated at the local level with all affected stakeholders, such as the case regarding student uses of cell phones.

In the past several years, superintendents, school boards and advisory groups in 19 out of the 24 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have taken proactive action to establish, update, or study district-wide cell phone policies. These efforts include establishing new policies specific to the use of cell phones, updating board policies, revising the district's code of conduct or student handbook regarding the use of technology to include cell phones or "smart" technology, and/or introducing pilot programs. Currently, 5 LEAs also have pilot programs underway to study the impact of varying levels of cell phone restrictions during the school day. Much of the local work

in establishing these policies was aided through surveys to parents, teachers, and students, as well as extensive public meetings.

In addition, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), under the State Superintendent's leadership, has recently convened a broad workgroup of stakeholders, including superintendents, to study the use of cell phones in schools with the goal of recommending guidance for State Board adoption in the next few months. We support this workgroup and its on-the-ground membership to study this complex issue. The workgroup will anchor its work utilizing the newly released guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, as well as reflecting on the experiences of the local school districts who have already delved deep in their communities to determine the appropriateness of the use of cell phones and "smart technology" in the classroom and in schools.

PSSAM remains committed to focusing on empowering local decision-making to ensure education policies that are relevant, flexible, and reflective of the unique needs of each community. Again, we appreciate the bill's good intentions, but ask the Legislature to allow the education experts at the local level, as well as the MSDE-convened workgroup, to continue to examine this issue to determine the most effective public policies.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 147 and kindly requests an unfavorable report.