

**SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**

**Written Testimony (Favorable)**

**Submitted By:** Alana Lerner

Good afternoon members of the Committee and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Alana Lerner, and I am a Montgomery County mom of 3 young children. I am a parent supporter of Distraction-Free Schools Maryland, joining over 1,000 other Maryland parents eager for phone-free schools. And I am a proud third-generation educator with experience as a high school science teacher, after school program leader, and career readiness instructor.

I am testifying fully in favor of Senator Harris' bill 928, the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act. Maryland is one of only a handful of states without any legislation regarding phones and social media in school. Frankly, we are falling behind. I thank Senator Harris and the bill's co-sponsors for their leadership in proposing a thorough bill to prohibit K-12 students from using personal devices during the instructional day. I was also grateful to hear that the Senator intends to amend SB928 to remove exceptions for emergency use and add language to ensure devices are inaccessible during the school day. These are important additions to ensure schools are places of focused learning and hubs of social-emotional development.

As a parent, I want school to be a place of bustling social connection and learning – a safe haven for my kids to practice how to engage with peers in the real world. Sadly, a recent study showed that teens check their smartphones more than 100 times per day, with 97 percent reporting use during school hours. The future I want for my children cannot take place in device-distracted classrooms and quiet hallways filled with students staring at screens between classes. Thankfully, SB928 addresses my concerns and resets our schools as places of human connection from bell-to-bell.

As an educator, I appreciate the added inclusion of device storage and inaccessibility in the bill. Without a storage requirement, policy enforcement will unfairly fall to teachers, leading to inconsistency or non-enforcement. During my time in the classroom, spotting a phone out in class meant that the burden fell on me to enforce a policy and derail my lesson to address it. Teachers shouldn't have to waste precious instructional time to engage in conflict regarding phones.

Currently, I serve as a career readiness instructor for a post-secondary workforce development organization. I teach courses on networking, resume writing, interview skills, and professional etiquette to prepare 18-29 year olds for an internship with our corporate partners. The biggest piece of feedback from our students' internship managers is that this generation needs to rebuild their interpersonal and soft skills. In response to this feedback, we've recently changed our model to increase the amount of in-person programming and peer-to-peer collaborative workshops. SB928 is an opportunity to set our Maryland youth up for success not only in this moment, but also for their future. I request a favorable vote on SB928.