

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

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted by: Sara Lippa, PhD, ABPP, Board-Certified Clinical Neuropsychologist

Dear Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

My name is Sara Lippa. I am a board-certified clinical neuropsychologist and a parent of two children in Montgomery County Public Schools, currently in grades 2 and 4. I am honored to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 928.

Senate Bill 928 would require inaccessible storage of students' personal electronic communication devices during the school day. This is a critical provision. Without structured storage, device bans are inconsistently implemented, enforcement falls on teachers, and compliance varies classroom to classroom. As State Superintendent Carey Wright noted in her August presentation to the Maryland State Board of Education, structured phone-free policies with secure storage are the most effective approach for improving student learning and supporting educators.¹

In Montgomery County, a prohibition on devices was extended to middle schools this past year without a storage requirement. Predictably, classroom device holders are inconsistently used, enforcement varies, and students continue to access their phones during the school day. This places an unfair burden on teachers and administrators and undermines the intent of the policy.

As both a clinician and a parent, I am deeply concerned about student readiness and long-term outcomes. In Montgomery County, as few as 9% of 10th graders are considered on track to be College and Career Ready.² Colleges across the country report that even high-achieving students struggle to sustain attention, read long-form material, think critically, and write coherently. These are foundational cognitive skills.

Smartphones are not neutral tools in this context. They are intentionally engineered to fragment attention. Notifications, messaging apps, and social media platforms are designed to trigger frequent checking behaviors. Even when unused, the mere presence of a smartphone has been shown to reduce working memory and cognitive capacity.³ From a neuropsychological perspective, sustained attention is a finite resource. The school day should protect and strengthen it—not continuously erode it.

Beyond academics, there is a growing and concerning body of evidence linking excessive screen time and social media use to increased rates of anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and diminished self-esteem in children and adolescents. When phones are accessible during school

¹ Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools, State Board Resolution on Cell Phone Use in Schools (Aug. 26, 2025).

² Adam Pagnucco, Montgomery Perspective, MCPS's Shocking Performance on College and Career Readiness (Apr. 4, 2024).

³ Adrian F. Ward, Kristen Duke, Ayelet Gneezy, and Maarten W. Bos, Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2:2, 140-154. (2017).

hours, peer conflict, cyberbullying, and social comparison do not pause, but expand in hallways and classrooms. This amplifies stress and disrupts the educational environment.

It is essential that we preserve the school day as a protected space, free from personal devices and social media. Only in such an environment can students fully engage in learning, practice face-to-face communication, develop emotional regulation, and build resilience. Childhood and adolescence are brief and formative. Schools must be structured around developmental science—not around devices designed to capture and monetize attention.

Senate Bill 928 aligns with the science of learning, reflects the preferences of the majority of parents and educators,⁴ and provides a clear, consistent standard for all Maryland school districts. Most importantly, it protects the integrity of the school day for every student.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB928.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sara Lippa". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

Sara Lippa, ABPP-CN
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⁴ Institute for Families & Technology, Public Opinion Survey on Voters' Views on Phones in Schools (Jan. 20, 2026).