

**SB0928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**

*Written Testimony (Favorable) before Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

**Submitted By:** Betsy Tao, MCCPTA & Distraction Free Schools Maryland

My name is Betsy Tao. I am a parent with two kids in MCPS schools. I serve as the chair of the technology committee for our county council of PTAs. I also lead Distraction Free Schools Maryland, which is a coalition of over 1000 parents in Maryland who support phone free schools.<sup>1</sup> I am honored to be here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 928, the Phone Free Schools Act, as amended to match the latest version of its companion bill, House Bill 525.

What I'd like the committee to understand is this: Of all the education bills crossing your desks this session, this one is the most important. We can't successfully invest in our children's future without directly addressing why our schools are no longer environments conducive to learning. Every single student in Maryland is negatively affected by the distraction of technology in classrooms, starting with personal mobile devices. If we don't make meaningful steps to remove those distractions, starting with personal mobile devices, this Committee's work on educational investments and interventions simply will not have the intended effect.

Senate Bill 928 moves us boldly and courageously in the right direction by mandating that personal devices, especially smartphones, be inaccessible during the entire school day, bell to bell, for all students kindergarten through 12th grade. Let me paint a picture for you of a middle schooler in Montgomery County, which currently has a full day phone ban without an inaccessible storage mandate like the one in this bill. This student's smartphone sits in her pocket, buzzing with notifications from group chats and apps. Next to her are classmates playing games and watching videos on their Chromebooks, which they carry around with them all day instead of books. Her teacher is standing in front of a giant screen, with distracting animated images added on slides to catch students' attention. Does this sound like a healthy learning environment to you? Is it any wonder that our students are struggling on core

---

<sup>1</sup> Distraction Free Schools Maryland, [Community Letter of Support Testimonials](#) (continuously updated).

subjects, are less cognitively capable than prior generations, and show up at colleges unable to read, do basic math, or manage their time effectively enough to even meet deadlines?<sup>2</sup>

Some people believe that kids need to learn how to manage their use of devices as technology is a feature of modern life. This statement sounds reasonable on its face, but it is a pernicious myth and needs to be called out as such whenever it is uttered. How many adults do you know struggle to manage their device use? Surveys show that half of all adults admit to being addicted to their devices. Teenagers spend 6-8 hours a day on average on devices watching videos and scrolling through social media.<sup>3</sup> There is no such thing as digital balance because it was never a level playing field - tech companies have spent billions of dollars to maximize our engagement on their platforms, stealing as much of our time as possible. Our kids never stood a chance.

We need to give kids seven hours a day, 180 days a year, when they can be free to regain some of the skills that technology has stolen from them: the ability to be still, to think deeply and critically and with intention, to read and reflect on what they've read, to engage face to face with their teachers and peers, to be in tune with their own thoughts, to discover who they are.

Bell to bell bans are becoming the norm across the country,<sup>4</sup> and Maryland can be a national leader by passing this bill. This bill is aligned with the science of learning, aligned with what the majority of parents and educators want,<sup>5</sup> and provides a consistent policy for all Maryland's school districts benefitting every single student in the state. Therefore, I urge this committee to support this bill. Thank you.

## Enclosures

- Phone Free Schools Report Card - Maryland
- Distraction Free Schools Community of Support Testimonials (to date)
- National Association of School Resource Officers, Canady Letter

---

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Adam Pagnucco, Montgomery Perspective, [MCPS's Shocking Performance on College and Career Readiness](#) (Apr. 4, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, [Average Amount of Screen Time for Children and Young Adults](#) (Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>4</sup> [First-of-Its-Kind National Educator Survey Reveals Both Promise and Peril in School Cell Phone Policies](#)

<sup>5</sup> Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools, [State Board Resolution on Cell Phone Use in Schools](#) (Aug. 26, 2025).