

## Maryland Youth Advisory Council

Annapolis, Maryland

February 2, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

The **Maryland Youth Advisory Council (MYAC)** serves as the official voice of Maryland's youth, advising the Governor and the General Assembly on the issues that define our educational and social experiences. We are writing to provide **favorable testimony on Senate Bill 0079 with amendments**.

The Council shares the committee's concern regarding the impact of digital distractions on student mental health and academic performance. However, as currently drafted, the broad definition of "personal electronic devices" threatens to deepen the digital divide and disproportionately harm students in low-income communities.

Seven years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are still circulating the same hardware distributed during the initial 1:1 rollout. These devices are frequently in a state of disrepair—suffering from hardware failure and software obsolescence. Because many districts impose replacement fees as high as **\$300**, many students from low-income families are unable to repair school-issued laptops. These students rely on their personal devices to ensure their coursework is completed and their grades do not suffer.

While the bill allows for an exception for "educational purposes" under the direction of an administrator or educator, this creates a standard of **discretionary access**. A student's ability to engage with the curriculum should not be subject to an individual instructor's preference. If a teacher prohibits the use of a personal laptop, a student with a broken school device is effectively locked out of the digital classroom, creating an inequitable learning environment.

To address these concerns while still achieving the bill's goals, the Council urges the committee to **amend the scope of SB0079 to limit cellular devices (smartphones) strictly**.

1. **Target the Distraction:** Modern research identifies smartphones and social media notifications as the primary drivers of classroom distraction, rather than laptops or tablets used for note-taking and research.
2. **Protect Academic Continuity:** By exempting laptops and tablets, the State ensures that students whose school-issued devices are failing can still use their own functional technology to learn without fear of confiscation or disciplinary action.

Maryland's youth are committed to a focused learning environment, but that focus must be supported by equitable access to technology. We respectfully request a **favorable with amendments** report on SB0079.

Sincerely,

**The Maryland Youth Advisory Council**