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BILL: SB 928
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
DATE: March 4, 2026
POSITION: Unfavorable
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **opposes** Senate Bill 928

This bill requires each local board of education to develop and implement, by the 2027-2028 school year, a policy to prohibit the use of cellular phones by students during the academic school day, which is defined as any time during the school day, including a student's lunch, recess, or passing period. The policy must also require students to store their phones in a secure place during instructional time and prohibit a student from using social media applications and websites as determined by the local school board during school hours. The policy may not prohibit a student from using a phone (1) for any purpose documented in the student's individualized education program or Section 504 Plan; (2) to monitor or address a student's documented health issue; (3) during an emergency event, if expressly authorized by an administrator; (4) when directed by an education or administrator for educational purposes; (5) to access language translation tools when a school-issued device is not available; or (6) for the purpose of meeting caregiving responsibilities, as approved by the principal. The policy must also establish administrator-enforced tiered disciplinary measures for violations, excluding suspension or expulsion solely for violating the policy. The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

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 every 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. 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) convened a broad workgroup of stakeholders in 2025, including several superintendents, to study this issue. We strongly supported this workgroup and its on-the-ground membership. The workgroup anchored its work in national research and partnered with Phones in Focus who have initiated a national study based on educator input regarding best practices around the county. More importantly, the workgroup used the experiences of the local school districts who have already delved deep in their communities to determine the appropriate use of cell phones and "smart technology" in classrooms and 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 state and local level to enact and enforce the most effective public policies.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** Senate Bill 928 and kindly requests an **unfavorable** report.