

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

Written Testimony (Favorable)
Submitted By: Colleen Uzupus

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

I am a Baltimore County mother of two elementary students, school nurse in Baltimore County Public Schools, and community volunteer. I am submitting testimony in support of SB0928 - The Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act. I commend Senator Harris and the bill's co-sponsors for their leadership in proposing this rigorous bill including K-12 prohibition on personal devices during the instructional day and mandated storage so the devices are inaccessible.

As a parent, I prioritize shared experiences, personal interactions, and opportunities for independence and growth away from screens. I role model healthy use of phones and screens for my children. To sponsor this bill, I know that you are well aware of the research regarding the pervasiveness of phones into the lives of school aged children and the detriments to their educational, social, and emotional development.

I wanted to share MY own experience in Baltimore County Public Schools, where there is an "off and away" policy in place this school year and why this is simply insufficient. I work as a floating substitute nurse in BCPS, covering the health offices of elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the county. I frequently find students on their phones while waiting to see the nurse. I will remind them that the BCPS policy applies to the health room as well and the students will respectfully put their phones away . . . until 5 minutes later when I have to repeat my reminder. These children are not being defiant; when reminded, they sheepishly put them away again. They are already habituated to pull their phones out in a situation where they are expected to wait patiently. Even my middle school students, 11-14 year old kids, are unable to sit with their thoughts or health based reading materials. May I repeat, **these children are not being defiant, disrespectful, or contradictory. They are just unable to resist the temptation of the screen in their pocket.** This is why "off and away" is insufficient and phones need to be inaccessible for the school day.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of The Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act. I am grateful that my legislators are addressing this now; there is no time to wait.

Sincerely,

Colleen Uzupus