

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

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted By: Anna Winthrop

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

My name is Anna Winthrop and I have two children in MCPS schools. I am also an educator, and prior to moving to Montgomery County, spent many years teaching at NYU, during which time I not only spent a great deal of time with my students, but did research on education systems and student engagement. I also happen to have a sister, Rebecca Winthrop, who is the Director of Universal Education at the Brookings Institute, and has been focusing her recent research on the use of technology in schools. While we face many challenges around technology, phone free schools are an absolute no brainer. The research is clear - these devices are built to be stronger than us and only lead to lower academic outcomes and higher incidences of mental health issues. The addictive nature of this type of technology makes it extremely challenging for students to focus and engage in school, even if the device is in a pocket or nearby and not turned on.

I was shocked that Maryland is so behind in this. It is our responsibility to create an environment where all children can thrive. Our classrooms are no exception, and a very simple step in the right direction is to pass strong phone free school legislation that does not allow for students to have access to phones or social media while at school.

I would also argue that you do not need to be an educator or researcher to understand this. I have often likened phones and social media to giving kids cocaine, making it readily available, then blaming them for becoming drug addicts instead of the best versions of themselves. It is cruel to put the blame on students and teachers for the detrimental effects of these devices. This is equally true for distractions on school sanctioned devices (which is another issue I hope the Senate will support in the future).

Please pass SB928, this is the first step in helping to free students from the distractions and harms that phone's present in a school environment. This type of legislation can be implemented easily, without need for additional funding or training of teachers and staff, and has only been shown to benefit students and schools.

I want to thank Senators Harris, Washington and Carozza for championing this important bill.

Best,
Anna Winthrop

