

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

We are writing in support of SB928, which would establish phone-free schools in Maryland. We applaud your efforts to protect children and believe that a first bell to last bell K-12 policy is imperative.

We are the authors and primary researchers of the book *The Anxious Generation*, which documents the negative effects that smartphones and heavy social media use have had on youth around the globe. The book has spent more than 35 weeks at the top of bestseller lists and has been used to motivate grassroots mobilization of students, teachers, administrators, and parents for phone-free schools. Technology can certainly provide benefits to young people, but the current business incentives and practices of some tech companies are causing vast harm to children and adolescents. Protecting kids from online harm is non-partisan and supported by the majority of Americans. Legislators have the opportunity to take clear, decisive action, joining the bipartisan movement to protect kids' mental health, attention, and relationships by supporting phone-free schools.

The proposed legislation would be an important step toward giving K-12 students a break from harmful and addictive technology during the 6-7 hours each weekday they are at school. This is critically important for students, as well as for teachers and administrators. Schools influence 13 years of critical child development and can help students establish lifelong patterns of healthy behavior. Based on our research, we believe that phone-free policies are likely to provide substantial academic, socio-emotional, safety, and economic benefits for schools.

Phone-free schools are likely to reduce distraction and increase student focus. Recent studies have found that students receive an average of [237 notifications](#) each day. Just during the school day, [students spend an average of 90 minutes on their phones](#), with 25% spending more than 2 hours. [Experimental studies](#) have found that students' device use reduces subsequent academic performance. [35 percent of students](#) admit to using their phones to cheat. [Many instances](#) of bullying and fighting begin with electronic communications.

Teachers, who are best qualified to comment on the effects of phones in schools, recognize the problem. [84%](#) of educators believe that social media contributes to mental health issues among students at their schools. [91%](#) said social media has negatively affected how students treat people in real life.

The problems have reached a tipping point. Teacher morale is plummeting, and [some teachers](#) have been driven to quit. [88% of teachers](#) believe that smartphones make their students more distracted or tired, while 74% believe they make students more depressed, anxious, or lonely, and 85% believe they increase student conflict and bullying. [72% of high school teachers](#) say that cell phone distraction in their classes is a major problem. [83% of teachers](#) support a policy that prohibits phone use for the entire school day.

We are aware that Maryland is also considering a K-8 bill, and we want to assure you that the evidence is clear that students in grades 9-12 need a break from phones and other personal electronic devices just as much as their younger peers. We recommend that any policy include these five essential features, as outlined in [this model bill](#):

1. **Require all K-12 schools in the state to comply.** This eliminates confusion across districts, establishes a norm for the entire community, and allows students to relax, knowing they will not miss activities with friends at other schools. It also establishes a strong policy now, while the issue is receiving legislative attention.
2. **Physically separate students from all personal devices.** The regular use of devices in school distracts students, whether the device is a smartphone or is used only to receive text messages. We would encourage the bill to clarify that it fully separates students from all devices.
3. **Ban phones for the entire school day.** A class-time-only rule also doesn't provide teachers with as much benefit as they might expect. Research from the National Education Association [found that](#) 73% of teachers in schools that allow phone use *between* classes report that phones are disruptive *during* class. In contrast, of the several policies examined, only the phone-free or "away for the day" policy produced good results, with only 28% of teachers in such schools saying that phones were disruptive during their classes. It is only when students have 6-7 hours away from their phones that they fully turn to each other and to their teachers.
4. **Stop schools from requiring smartphones and social media use.** Schools should not use social media as a primary communication tool, allowing parents the freedom to make individual choices about whether to use it, both for themselves and their kids.
5. **Include two (and only two) important exceptions.** While it may be tempting to add many exceptions to placate parent fears and local control advocates, we have found only two to be widely necessary: medical and special education needs. Some students may have a legitimate health or educational need that requires access to their own smartphone. A common exception is allowing students to use their phones in emergencies. While it makes emotional sense for parents to want to talk to their kids during an emergency, [experts](#) suggest that kids should focus on the teacher's instructions rather than calling their parents.

To date, close to 20 states have enacted K-12 bell-to-bell legislation. A few states, such as Georgia, first enacted a K-8 policy but have pending legislation to extend it to 12th grade.

We have yet to find a school that has earnestly tried to go phone-free and then regretted it. Students, teachers, and administrators [report a wide range of](#) positive benefits, from in-person socialization and laughter in the hallways to reduced distractions and improved student engagement.

We thank you for your efforts to protect children in Maryland and would be glad to follow up.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Haidt
Zach Rausch