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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson
SB0079:
County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy

Good Afternoon Chairman Senator Brian J. Feldman, and Vice Chairman Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, and the esteemed members of Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

This bill responds to a challenge many of our schools are facing to balance the educational benefits of schools with the very real disruptions and distractions that personal devices can cause in our classrooms. Today's students live in the most technologically advanced period the world has ever seen, and we want our schools to harness technology in ways that enhance instruction — not hinder it.

SB0079 simply requires each county board of education to develop and adopt a policy governing the use of personal electronic devices during school hours. Under this bill, these policies must restrict or limit the use of personal smartphones, tablets, laptops, smartwatches, or similar devices during instructional time — unless there are clearly defined educational or health-related reasons for their use.

Importantly, this legislation does not prohibit technology in schools. Instead, it ensures that when personal devices are used, they are used intentionally — for classroom activities, individualized instruction, or to accommodate documented health or educational needs such as those reflected in a student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan.

SB0079 also strengthens transparency and communication by requiring each county board to publish the adopted policy on their website and include it in student handbooks. This ensures that students, parents, educators, and administrators all understand expectations and can work together to support productive learning environments.

This bill respects local control by leaving the development of specific policies to the boards closest to the students and families and supports classroom focus and instructional time by limiting disruptive device use. It protects essential access for students who need technology for health or documented educational purposes.

By requiring thoughtful, transparent policies, SB0079 helps ensure our schools are places where students can thrive academically while in this challenging modern landscape, stay engaged, and access technology safely and intentionally.

Thus, I urge a favorable report on SB0079 and thank you for your consideration.