

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is James Frank. I left teaching at Baltimore County Public Schools, in large part because of the effects of cell phone use. Today, twenty years later, I'm a parent of two middle schoolers in that same system, and I can't believe how much worse things have gotten in our classrooms.

I'm here in strong support of eliminating student cell phone access during school hours.

In my classroom in 2004, phones were a hidden communication channel throughout the school day. Students texted under desks to coordinate fights and harass one another. Adults couldn't intervene in social dynamics until it was too late. In one instance, I was injured intervening in a fight that had been planned through phone communication during instructional time. The pattern was clear: teachers were ineffective because there was a separate and hidden communication channel distracting students and preventing real time conflict resolution.

Today, as a parent, I see that same dynamic intensified by smartphones and school-issued devices. My own children were failing classes last year because they were able to bypass content blocks on their school laptops and spend instructional time on YouTube and social gaming with friends. We only saw their grades recover once access was restricted. The issue isn't just distraction. It's private access any time a student feels the urge to open a device full of addictive content. Academic disengagement, social pressure, and online conflict unfold throughout the day outside of adult awareness. Trust in the system disintegrates.

Policies that allow partial access or rely on expectation alone tend to result in uneven enforcement and predictable workarounds. Students adapt quickly. The hidden channel remains open.

A clear bell-to-bell policy with inaccessible storage closes that channel. It restores focus to learning, supports educators, and protects students from pressures that do not belong in the school day.

This is about safety, attention, and creating an environment where students can actually be present and learn.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your time.