

**SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device
Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
Written Testimony (Favorable)
Testimony Of Fairplay, Bzu Shiferaw, Campaign Manager**

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

My name is Bzu Shiferaw and I am the Campaign Manager at Fairplay. We are a national nonprofit that works to enhance children's well-being by eliminating the exploitative and harmful business practices of marketers and Big Tech.

I would like to thank the Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee for hosting this hearing on SB928, the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act, and for providing me the opportunity to testify on this urgent issue.

Over the past two years Fairplay, in collaboration with similar organizations, have worked to pass comprehensive phone-free legislation in 19 states and in the District of Columbia. As tech companies design their products to maximize engagement, these policies ensure that students have a distraction-free learning environment.

Phones and social media disrupt instruction, undermine teachers' ability to educate, and contribute to declines in students' social emotional development, especially as lunch and free time are spent on screens. Excessive phone use during school also increases exposure to serious harms, including bullying, sexual predators, content promoting suicide and self-harm, eating disorders, drugs, and dangerous challenges.

A bell-to-bell policy can create the conditions for real life interactions and the ability to focus on learning in Maryland schools. Fairplay and our partners at the Phone-Free Schools Movement also offer [free implementation toolkits](#) that highlight the urgency of the problem and support districts, administrators and families in making this transition successful. In emergencies, safety experts agree students are safest when they are focused on instructions from school staff, and not distracted by phones.

We urge the committee to advance strong legislation and provide Maryland students the focused, connected school environment they deserve.

Thank you,

Bzu Shiferaw

Campaign Manager, Fairplay