



KABOOM! Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 79
County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 4, 2026

I would like to thank the committee chairs for the opportunity to express KABOOM!’s support for SB 79, which relates to the prohibition of using electronic devices by students during school hours except for certain educational purposes. KABOOM! is the national nonprofit focused on creating greater access to outdoor play and recreation for children in every community but especially those who live in neighborhoods that have experienced historical disinvestment due to racial and economic discrimination.

Each day seems to bring a new headline on how the addictive features of social media applications, commonly found on smart phones or other devices, is having a detrimental effect on our children’s mental health. Already, two technology companies which operate Snapchat and TikTok have settled lawsuits which claim that they purposefully embed features that make their products addictive and have caused significant harm. Reducing children’s exposure to these features on their mobile devices would significantly improve their mental health and academic outcomes. That is why KABOOM! supports banning such devices for recreational use during the normal school day.

At the same time, we must recognize that we can’t completely prohibit children from accessing these technological devices, which have become ubiquitous in our society. There may be times when a child would need to access their device to contact a parent or caregiver. Provisions in the school districts’ plans should take this need into account and find ways to accommodate the storage of students’ devices while at school as opposed to an outright ban on devices’ presence from school grounds. Striking the right balance between accessing devices, setting them down, and how to use them in a healthy way is something that requires a whole-society level of response.

As part of that response, we have an obligation to develop healthy and nurturing alternatives to the entertainment kids get from their mobile devices. At KABOOM!, we believe playspaces are one such alternative that ought to be widely available at our schools. For the last five years we have worked with the Baltimore City Public School system to renovate schoolyard playgrounds across the district. This work entails not only repair and restoration of existing play equipment but introducing new features that are more inclusive, more engaging, and designed to foster greater social interaction amongst the students. Social connectivity in the real world combined with high quality, kinetic play are essential elements to providing young children with viable alternatives to the applications found on their mobile devices.

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Not only does outdoor recreation provide students with an alternative to engaging with their phones, it can also have a restorative effect on their mental health. A 2024 study in the Journal of American College Health found that time spent outdoors and in nature can improve the mental health of students who were experiencing anxiety or depression due to time spent online. In 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General's office issued a public health advisory on the youth mental health crisis and specifically advocated for the expansion of recreational outdoor activities as a cost-effective way to help mitigate the negative mental health consequences children are facing at scale.

We urge the General Assembly to consider all the ways we must confront the dangers addictive applications on mobile devices pose to our children. Simply taking away their devices, while an important and beneficial first step, ought to be followed up on by providing them safer and restorative alternatives.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts on this legislation and we welcome the opportunity to work with this body to help protect our kids

We hope that this grant program can serve as a model for other funding streams in the future. While participatory grant making should not replace the current method of allocating most public funds, there are ways to make some existing streams more responsive to residents' wishes and this program can serve as an important proof of concept for this approach.