



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy **Vision:** Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 928
County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Establishment
(Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
Committee: Ways and Means
By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)
Hearing Date: March 4, 2026

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of **SB 928**, which would require county boards of education to establish clear, consistent policies limiting student cellular phone use during the school day.

Excessive phone use in schools has been shown to contribute to distractions, reduced academic engagement, and increased stress and anxiety among students. By setting reasonable boundaries around phone use, this bill promotes learning-focused environments that allow students to be more present, attentive, socially connected during the school day, and have improved test scores.^{1, 2} Data from the Pew Research shows that " 72% of U.S. high school teachers say cellphone distraction is a major problem in the classroom".³

Several U.S. states have introduced Phone-Free School Acts, largely targeting the restriction of smartphones and, in some cases, smartwatches during the school day to boost focus and mental health. California's AB 3216 requires districts to limit or prohibit phone use by July 1, 2026, while other states like Florida, Texas, and South Carolina have implemented similar measures.^{4, 5}

¹ Huey M, Giguere D. The Impact of Smartphone Use on Course Comprehension and Psychological Well-Being in the College Classroom. *Innov High Educ.* 2023;48(3):527-537. doi: 10.1007/s10755-022-09638-1. Epub 2022 Nov 18. PMID: 36440453; PMCID: PMC9676861.

² Ma, W., Lin, X., Lou, J., Liu, Y., Tang, W., & Bao, Z. (2023). The impact of students' cellphone-use and self-control on academic performance in traditional classroom. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 24(4), 591–598. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-023-09824-6>

³ Hatfield, J. (2024, June 12). 72% of U.S. high school teachers say cellphone distraction is a major problem in the classroom. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/12/72-percent-of-us-high-school-teachers-say-cellphone-distraction-is-a-major-problem-in-the-classroom/>

⁴ kffsashaz. (2024, September 5). *A look at state efforts to ban cellphones in schools and implications for youth mental health*. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/a-look-at-state-efforts-to-ban-cellphones-in-schools-and-implications-for-youth-mental-health/>

⁵ National Conference of State Legislators. Hold the Phone: Recent State Activity on Cell Use in Schools. (October 29, 2024). Retrieved on February 10, 2026 from <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/hold-the-phone-recent-state-activity-on-cell-use-in-schools#:~:text=Some%20states%20that%20have%20enacted%20legislation%20include:,to%20personal%20devices%20during%20the%20school%20day>

Importantly, this legislation balances academic and developmental benefits with student safety and individual needs. The bill explicitly protects a student’s right to use a cellular phone when required by an individualized education program, to manage documented health conditions, during emergency situations, or when directed by educators for instructional purposes, to access language translation tools, or to meet caregiving duties. These safeguards ensure that phone-use policies are implemented equitably and flexibly, without undermining accessibility, student well-being, or educational innovation.

The Maryland Public Health Association urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 928 as there are documented negative consequences of too much screen time, especially social media on youth mental health.^{6,7} For example, a 2021 systematic review on the relationship between screen time and mental health in young people found evidence of a positive association between phone use, computer/internet use, and depression, while other forms of screen time such as video games and television had weaker associations.⁸ Riehm and colleagues’ work suggests that more than 3 hours a day spent on social media use is what is particularly risky. As so much of a youth’s day is spent in schools, if schools are able to limit time spent on devices, there may be mental health benefits, in addition to educational benefits.¹ Parents and students alike have been supportive of such measures, and this support has been growing.⁹

Finally, requiring statewide implementation by the 2027–2028 school year provides school systems with adequate time to engage stakeholders, develop thoughtful policies, and communicate expectations to students and families. Establishing consistent standards across counties will reduce confusion, support educators in classroom management, and reinforce a shared commitment to student success.

For these reasons, we urge favorable consideration of this bill (SB928) as a meaningful step toward improving educational outcomes and student well-being across Maryland schools.

Thank you.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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⁶ Riehm KE, Feder KA, Tormohlen KN, et al. Associations Between Time Spent Using Social Media and Internalizing and Externalizing Problems Among US Youth. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2019;76(12):1266–1273. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry (2019).2325

⁷ Murthy, V. Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The US Surgeon General's Advisory; 2023. available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/youth-mental-health/social-media/index.html>. (accessed 27 February 2026) (2023).

⁸ Tang, Samantha, et al. The Relationship Between Screen Time and Mental Health in Young People: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies. *Clinical Psychology Review* 86 (2021): 102021.

⁹ Saavedra, A. et al. Survey: Parents and Teens Support School Cellphone Bans, and Most Don’t Perceive Major Downsides. *Brookings* (January 26, 2026); available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/survey-parents-and-teens-support-school-cellphone-bans-and-most-dont-perceive-major-downsides/#:~:text=Now%2C%20over%2090%25%20of%20adults,adults%20do%20not%20perceive%20downsides>. (accessed 27 February 2026).