

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
Written Testimony (Favorable)
Submitted By: Sarah Weber

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

My name is Sarah Weber, and I am a parent of two children, grades 3 and 7, in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS). Since the pandemic I have grown increasingly concerned about the ways we are using technology in schools, both intentionally and unintentionally, that can have negative unintended consequences. Since 2024 I have been advocating with PGCPS to put measures in place to restrict student cell phone use during the school day.

I'm very grateful to see the State of Maryland finally taking a hard look at the issue of student cell phone use in schools, and I'm submitting testimony today to express support for Senators Harris, Charles, A. Washington, and Carozza for championing this important bill. I support this bill based on the amendments made to the cross-filed House Bill 525.

This legislation is long overdue. Numerous studies indicate that children, due to their developing brains, often struggle with self-regulation and impulse control. Once phones are allowed or expected for school purposes, it is incredibly difficult to ensure they won't be used for other purposes, such as playing games, texting, social media, etc. Research highlights that the constant presence of mobile phones can lead to distractions, hinder academic performance, and contribute to poor mental health and depression. Teachers already face numerous challenges in managing their classrooms. Introducing a policy to restrict mobile phone use could alleviate some of their burdens, allowing them to concentrate more on teaching rather than policing phone usage. Even for safety reasons, phones in school are not necessary: first responders indicate that it is safer for students to listen to directions and stay quiet than to be using their phones to communicate with family.

Maryland owes it to its students to get out ahead on this issue and help reduce kids' exposure to addictive devices while in school. The evidence is loud and clear at this point, and now is the time to act.