

**MSCA SB 79 FAV 2026.pdf**

Uploaded by: Jocelyn Collins

Position: FAV



MARYLAND  
SCHOOL  
COUNSELOR  
ASSOCIATION

**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 79 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements

**Hearing Date:** February 4, 2026

**Position:** Support

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On behalf of the Maryland School Counselor Association (MSCA), which represents school counselors across the State committed to the academic, career, and social–emotional development of all students, we respectfully request a **favorable report on SB 79**.

SB 79 requires each county board of education to develop and adopt a policy restricting or limiting the use of personal electronic devices during school hours while protecting necessary educational and health-related use.

### **School Counselors See the Impact of Unrestricted Device Use**

School counselors witness daily the effects that personal electronic devices — especially smartphones and similar technologies — can have on student focus, classroom engagement, peer interactions, and well-being. These devices can be powerful tools for learning when used intentionally; however, research and educator experience show that unrestricted or unmanaged use during instructional time often contributes to:

- **Distractions from learning** and reduced academic engagement.
- **Social comparison, anxiety, and emotional distress** linked to social media use.
- **Increased disciplinary referrals** related to conflicts that begin online or are exacerbated by device use during the school day.

By supporting SB 79, the Maryland General Assembly acknowledges that school communities need clear, research-informed guidelines to balance technology benefits with students' developmental and educational needs.

## **Purposeful Restrictions Support Mental Health and School Climate**

School counselors play a central role in fostering safe, supportive, and orderly school environments. Policies that limit non-instructional device use — while clarifying exceptions for documented educational purposes, health monitoring, or individualized plans — empower staff to maintain focus on learning and personal development. The bill specifically:

- Encourages **consistent expectations statewide**, while allowing local boards to tailor policies to community needs.
- Respects the rights of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) or 504 Plans who require assistive device use.
- Promotes **transparency and accountability** through required publication in student handbooks and county board websites.

Clear policies reduce confusion among students, families, and educators about when and how devices may be used, enabling school counselors and teachers to focus on instruction, counseling interventions, and proactive supports rather than constant disciplinary responses to device misuse.

### **Conclusion**

SB 79 is a thoughtful step toward supporting learning environments that prioritize student engagement, mental health, and academic success. School counselors stand ready to support implementation by helping schools communicate expectations, engage families, and integrate healthy technology habits into counseling curricula.

For these reasons, MSCA urges a **favorable report** on SB 79. If you have any questions, please contact Jocelyn I. Collins at [jcollins@policypartners.net](mailto:jcollins@policypartners.net).

# **NASW Maryland - 2026 SB 79 FAV - Student Technolog**

Uploaded by: Karessa Proctor

Position: FAV



**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
February 4, 2026**

**Senate Bill 79: County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy –  
Requirements**

**\*\*Support\*\***

On behalf of the Social Work in Schools Committee of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter, we would like to express our support for Senate Bill 79 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements.

The Maryland Social Work in Schools Committee includes school social workers serving in school systems throughout Maryland, working daily with students, their families, and school staff to remove barriers to learning and support student wellbeing. These barriers include struggles to meet basic needs (food, clothing, housing, healthcare), and factors that impact social, emotional, and behavioral well-being. Personal technology devices (from cell phones to watches to Smart Glasses with internet access) have a hugely negative impact on the social, emotional and behavioral well-being of our youth.

Youth—particularly adolescents—are developmentally peer-focused, and the use of personal technology devices in school fuels peer conflicts, anxiety, bullying and harassment, distraction from academics, and lagging social skills development. [Johns Hopkins University researchers](#) note that, “mounting research suggests that smartphone use may be fueling the country’s mental health crisis among youth—and leading to problems in schools that range from dwindling attention spans to a lack of engagement in learning and stymied social-emotional development.”

Writing this testimony as a school social worker in Maryland for 35 years, when bullying, harassment or drama related to personal technology use occurs in schools, the greater school community is affected. Students may self harm based on the damage inflicted by posts on social media during school. Crisis support from the school social worker, school counselor, or school psychologist, or outside providers (such as a mobile crisis team or emergency room staff) may be needed. Other students are distracted and/or upset. Instructional time is lost in class and teachers must regroup. Administrators must take time to address discipline violations. Loss of learning and a decreased sense of belonging happens when students are suspended for technology violations. Law enforcement personnel may be called to school. Overall student well-being and morale decreases. Along with the harm to students (and staff) well-being, there is an incredible amount of time spent addressing personal technology issues that takes away from the primary mission and purpose of our schools.

(over)

The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that as of April 2025, [35 states](#) across the range of the political spectrum have implemented, are piloting, or have introduced bans in their schools, and Johns Hopkins University reports that [20 LEAs](#) in Maryland have begun to take action. State-wide standards will help to protect students across Maryland. State-wide legislation (rather than Board of Education policies) will also support administrators as they support their staff creating a welcoming, supportive, safe environment in our schools.

We strongly support the development of legislation that puts guardrails on social media use during instructional time by limiting access to the full range students' personal technology devices. The policy should be tailored to students' ages and developmental levels, and allow flexibility for individual systems to meet the unique needs of their school community (such as student health issues) but mitigate the social, emotional, and behavioral impacts of personal device technology on the well-being and educational progress of all students.

We encourage the Committee to ensure that all student-owned electronic media with access to the internet be covered by this legislation. We also encourage the Committee to consider potential unintended consequences of allowing student use during emergency events.

We ask that you return a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Holly Flanagan, LCSW-C, Chair  
NASW-MD Social Work in Schools Committee and Maryland School Social Worker

**Michael\_Butkiewicz\_SB79\_StudentTechnology\_2026.pdf**

Uploaded by: Michael Butkiewicz

Position: FAV

**Michael Butkiewicz**

**9904 Belhaven Road, Bethesda, Maryland 20817**

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**SB 79 County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements**

**Bill Hearing Date February 4th, 2026**

**Position: Favorable**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Michael Butkiewicz. I am an author and civic-education researcher from Montgomery County, and my work has appeared across regional outlets. I write today in support of SB 79, not because the bill is flawless, but because Maryland urgently needs a policy framework that relies on intentional design rather than intuition to shape the conditions under which students learn.

I want to be candid about the limitations. The bill's decentralized approach to secondary-school standards raises legitimate concerns about uneven implementation. If one jurisdiction adopts a looser device policy and a student's academic performance suffers as a result, we are effectively tying educational outcomes to ZIP codes rather than establishing a uniform baseline that protects all students. This matters especially because the median lower-income student is already about 16% less likely to enroll in postsecondary education within a year of graduation.<sup>1</sup>

Research published by ETRD identifies major technology-based distractors like constant notifications, social media, pop-ups, device alerts, and cyberloafing.<sup>2</sup> Lower-income students are disproportionately affected because they are more likely to use older, slower, and less customizable devices that generate more notifications, more intrusive ads, and fewer built-in controls than those available in higher-income households.

Despite its imperfections, SB 79 establishes a necessary foundation for improving learning conditions, particularly in civics. The bill's statewide restrictions on personal-device use in elementary and middle school directly address the structural issues highlighted in the Maryland READS report, which warns of a

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Baltimore Community Foundation and Education Trust report on inequities in Maryland educational opportunity.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Educational Technology Research and Development (ETRD) study on digital distractions and student attention.

“literacy crisis,” and in the 2024 NAEP results, which show only 29% of eighth graders reaching proficiency.<sup>3</sup> These deficits make it harder for students to engage with complex statutory and civic texts that demand inference, interpretation, and sustained attention.

Maryland’s educators do extraordinary work, but they can only be as effective as the system that surrounds them. They deserve a framework that strengthens, not undermines, the conditions for learning.

While concerns about decentralization remain unresolved, SB 79 is a meaningful step forward. It is especially important for students in primary school and for lower-income Marylanders, who stand to benefit most from a learning environment that supports long-term civic understanding. By improving the conditions under which students develop literacy, focus, and judgment, we move closer to a system in which all Marylanders, regardless of income, are equipped to understand their civic institutions, recognize their stake in them, and make their voices heard.

***Please report favorably on SB 79.***

Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Grade 8 Reading results.

# **SB0079 Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Oluwatosin Afolabi

Position: FAV

JOANNE C. BENSON  
*Legislative District 24*  
Prince George's County

MAJORITY WHIP

Budget and Taxation Committee

*Subcommittees*

Education, Business, and Administration

Pensions

Chair, Procurement

*Joint Committees*

Audit and Evaluation Committee

Children, Youth, and Families

Ending Homelessness

Fair Practices and  
State Personnel Oversight



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson**  
**SB0079:**  
**County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy**

Good Afternoon Chairman Senator Brian J. Feldman, and Vice Chairman Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, and the esteemed members of Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

This bill responds to a challenge many of our schools are facing to balance the educational benefits of schools with the very real disruptions and distractions that personal devices can cause in our classrooms. Today's students live in the most technologically advanced period the world has ever seen, and we want our schools to harness technology in ways that enhance instruction — not hinder it.

SB0079 simply requires each county board of education to develop and adopt a policy governing the use of personal electronic devices during school hours. Under this bill, these policies must restrict or limit the use of personal smartphones, tablets, laptops, smartwatches, or similar devices during instructional time — unless there are clearly defined educational or health-related reasons for their use.

Importantly, this legislation does not prohibit technology in schools. Instead, it ensures that when personal devices are used, they are used intentionally — for classroom activities, individualized instruction, or to accommodate documented health or educational needs such as those reflected in a student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan.

SB0079 also strengthens transparency and communication by requiring each county board to publish the adopted policy on their website and include it in student handbooks. This ensures that students, parents, educators, and administrators all understand expectations and can work together to support productive learning environments.

This bill respects local control by leaving the development of specific policies to the boards closest to the students and families and supports classroom focus and instructional time by limiting disruptive device use. It protects essential access for students who need technology for health or documented educational purposes.

By requiring thoughtful, transparent policies, SB0079 helps ensure our schools are places where students can thrive academically while in this challenging modern landscape, stay engaged, and access technology safely and intentionally.

Thus, I urge a favorable report on SB0079 and thank you for your consideration.

**SB0079 Testimony (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Omar Diallo

Position: FAV

JOANNE C. BENSON  
*Legislative District 24*  
Prince George's County

MAJORITY WHIP

Budget and Taxation Committee

*Subcommittees*

Education, Business, and Administration

Pensions

Chair, Procurement

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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson**  
**SB0079:**  
**County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy**

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By requiring thoughtful, transparent policies, SB0079 helps ensure our schools are places where students can thrive academically while in this challenging modern landscape, stay engaged, and access technology safely and intentionally.

Thus, I urge a favorable report on SB0079 and thank you for your consideration.

# **Testimony in support of SB0079 - Student Technolog**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

02/04/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

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**TESTIMONY ON SB#/0079- POSITION: FAVORABLE**

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**County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements**

**TO:** Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0079, County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements**

As reported by the Institute of Education Sciences *More than Half of Public School Leaders Say Cell Phones Hurt Academic Performance*<sup>1</sup>

“The latest School Pulse Panel data underscore that school leaders see cell phones as more than just a classroom distraction,” said NCES Commissioner Peggy Carr. “With 53 percent of school leaders reporting negative impacts of cell phone use on academic performance, and even more citing negative impacts on students’ mental health and attention spans, schools are facing a critical issue. Schools are responding with practical solutions, like banning or restricting phone use.”

As reported in NEA today<sup>2</sup>

“It seems that everyone—including parents—agree that excessive phone use is detrimental to teenagers,” says Cassandra Dorn, a high school teacher in Red Bank, New Jersey. “We know about the negative effects on academic performance and mental health. Yet, as a society, we really haven’t had the collective will to address the problem.”

This bill will create a unified response for all Maryland public schools. It will accomplish this goal by requiring a county board of education to develop and adopt a policy on the use of personal electronic devices during school hours; requiring the policy to restrict or limit the use of personal electronic devices by students during school hours, except for any purpose documented in the student's education program or Section 504 plan, to monitor or address a student's health issue, or for certain educational purposes; requiring the policy to be published on the county board's website and in student handbooks; etc. Maryland can and should respond to the problem.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#/0079.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ies.ed.gov/learn/press-release/more-half-public-school-leaders-say-cell-phones-hurt-academic-performance>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/take-cellphones-out-classroom-educators-say>

# **KABOOM! - 2026 SB 79 FAV - Student Technology Use**

Uploaded by: Robert Mayer

Position: FAV



**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.

(over)

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.

**SB0079**

Uploaded by: Ronza Othman

Position: FAV



*Live the life you want.*

From: Ronza Othman, President  
National Federation of the Blind of Maryland  
15 Charles Plaza, #3002  
Baltimore, MD 21201 [president@nfbmd.org](mailto:president@nfbmd.org)

To: Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee to give an unfavorable report to SB0079 - County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements. The intention of the bill is admirable, but will create problems for students with disabilities, including blind students.

The bill does have a provision for students who use their personal devices for purposes related to their IEP's or Section 504 plans. While this is in theory a good provision, students deserve to retain the confidentiality they now have related to their 504 plans, and thus, their disabilities. A student who is permitted to use their electronic devices signals to other students that they have disabilities, and are thus more susceptible to all forms of bullying—physical, psychological, and/or electronic. For example in 2024, three in five disabled children reported to having been bullied, as compared to one in five non-disabled children. It is also worth noting how these statistics are typically under-reported. Certain characteristics are labeled in this country as protected, including disability. This does not only apply to adults. Children with disabilities deserve to have the same protections, and while improving focus in school is of the utmost importance, so is ensuring all students are safe and protected.

Moreover, colleges who have restricted technology use in classes have reported worse educational outcomes. Moreover, we have heard anecdotally how even college students without disabilities are subjecting their peers with disabilities who are allowed to use technology to bullying.

Students with disabilities use technology not only for access to academic information and learning materials. A blind student may use an iPhone to tell time because they cannot see posted clocks. They may use their phone or iPad for way-finding, e.g. reading classroom door numbers or posted flyers. They may use their technology for audio description or to make information that is only available visually accessible to them. And of course, they may read, take notes, do assignments, and do the typical academic work using technology since blind students are typically print disabled – meaning they cannot effectively use paper, pen, and handwriting.

Additionally, disabled students may use their personal devices for purposes not specifically outlined in their Section 504 plans, but still related to education and alternative techniques. For example, blind students often use apps for Optical Character Recognition (OCR), which allows for pictures of print documents to be turned into accessible text. They may use smart glasses and artificial intelligence to describe the board or slides, even live as teachers are demonstrating something or teaching a lesson. Disabled students may need to put extra reminders into their calendars for assignments, or text themselves, or any number of tasks requiring personal devices but which may not be explicitly stated in their Section 504 plans.

Requiring disabled students to explain themselves to teachers, whether in front of other students or in an individualized setting, creates a chilling effect which could cause them to not use assistive technology to its full potential. Additionally, having one's personal device confiscated prematurely could cause a disabled student to be unsuccessful until the device is returned to them. It is important for our students to learn about and use the tools available to them in preparation for post-secondary education and adulthood; the K-12 setting should be a safe space for them to do so.

For those reasons, we ask for an unfavorable report on SB0079. For questions, please contact me at [President@nfbmd.org](mailto:President@nfbmd.org) or at 443-426-4110.

## **Testimony SB79**

Uploaded by: Alana Lerner

Position: FWA

## **Written Witness Testimony on Senator Benson's Bill SB0079**

Bill: County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements

Witness Name: Alana Lerner

Good afternoon members of the Committee and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Alana Lerner, and I am a Montgomery County mom of 3 young children. I am a parent supporter of Distraction-Free Schools Maryland. And I am a proud third-generation educator with experience as a high school science teacher, after school program leader, and career readiness instructor.

I am here to testify on Senator Benson's Bill 79 regarding student technology in school. I thank the Senator for her leadership in proposing this important bill. However, I would urge the Committee to make two important amendments:

1. The bill must extend the full prohibition of devices to High School students.
2. The bill must provide specific details for device storage during the entire school day that make them inaccessible to students, with limited exceptions.

I have spent my career mentoring high school age students and young adults. In the last 10 years, it is increasingly challenging to sustain my students' attention. Put simply, I cannot compete against the dopamine hit that phones provide. A recent study found that teens spend an average of 70 minutes each day on their phones – that translates to 30 school days per year spent on their phone. Additionally, it takes 20 minutes to refocus on learning after a device disruption. High schoolers cannot be left behind in this bill.

Device storage language in the bill is imperative. Without a storage requirement, policy enforcement will unfairly fall to teachers, leading to inconsistency or non-enforcement. During my time in the classroom, I dreaded spotting a student with their phone out in class. In that moment, the burden fell on me to enforce a policy and derail my lesson to address it. Teachers shouldn't have to waste precious instructional time to engage in conflict regarding phones.

Thank you for the important work that Senator Benson and this Committee is doing to ensure our schools are places of focused learning and hubs of social-emotional development.

# **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Tech**

Uploaded by: Alicia Baines

Position: FWA

## **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

### **Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS (Disability Safeguards Required)**

Chair and members of the Committee:

I'm a Maryland parent and special education advocate. I support reasonable limits on student device use during school hours **only if disability safeguards are explicit and enforceable**. As written, SB0079 risks creating **abuse of power, discriminatory discipline, and preventable conflict**, because students with disabilities are too often treated as an exception on paper but punished in practice.

#### **What the bill does**

SB0079 requires every county board to adopt a policy that:

- prohibits personal device use in elementary/middle school
- limits personal device use in high school
- allows exceptions for IEP/504 documented purposes or documented health issues
- requires enforcement procedures, including disciplinary measures such as in-school suspension

#### **Why this impacts special education differently**

Students with disabilities disproportionately rely on personal devices for **access, communication, behavior regulation, and health and safety**—often in ways staff do not immediately recognize.

This includes:

- AAC apps or communication supports (even when a student uses speech sometimes)
- executive functioning supports (timers, reminders, visual schedules, task initiation tools)
- anxiety regulation tools (breathing apps, structured breaks, sensory regulation supports)
- reading/writing access tools (text-to-speech, speech-to-text, audiobooks)
- safety tools (GPS/location sharing for elopement risk, check-ins, crisis communication)
- diabetes monitoring and other health monitoring tools

The bill's exception language is necessary—but not sufficient—because **the harm happens at enforcement**.

## **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

### **How this leads to abuse of power and conflict**

SB0079 requires enforcement policies and explicitly includes discipline such as in-school suspension.

That is where power can be misused.

Here's what happens in real schools:

1. A student with a disability uses a device for regulation or access.
2. Staff interpret it as “noncompliance” or “defiance.”
3. The student is disciplined.
4. The parent objects and points to the IEP/504 or disability need.
5. The school responds: “The policy is the policy.”
6. Now we have conflict, exclusion, instructional loss, and potentially discriminatory discipline.

This cycle happens because the bill does not clearly require that:

- staff are trained on disability-related device use
- enforcement is individualized and consistent with IDEA/504
- discipline cannot be used as a workaround for unmet supports
- parents receive notice and a path to correct implementation problems quickly

### **The key gap: SB0079 creates a discipline pipeline without guardrails**

The bill **encourages districts to write “strict” enforcement rules** and allows in-school suspension as a response to device violations.

For students with disabilities, this becomes a pipeline to:

- repeated removals from instruction
- missed services
- increased behavior incidents
- manifestation issues
- escalation to exclusionary discipline

A device policy must not become a **behavior control tool** that ignores disability needs.

## **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

### **Amendments needed to protect students with disabilities**

If the Committee advances SB0079, it must be amended to include the following safeguards:

#### **1) Disability-first enforcement standard**

Add language requiring that enforcement **must be consistent with IDEA and Section 504**, including implementation of accommodations, supplementary aids/services, and behavior supports.

#### **2) No discipline for disability-related use**

Prohibit discipline when the device use is reasonably connected to:

- IEP/504 accommodations
- documented disability-related regulation needs
- documented health/safety needs

#### **3) Immediate parent notice + rapid correction path**

Require written notice to parents within 24 hours of:

- any device confiscation involving an IEP/504 student, or
- any disciplinary action tied to a device issue

And require an expedited school-based review process (e.g., within 5 school days) to correct misapplication.

#### **4) Staff training requirement**

Require annual training for staff on:

- disability-related device usage
- AAC and assistive technology basics
- avoiding discriminatory discipline patterns

#### **5) Data transparency to prevent discriminatory enforcement**

Require districts to track and publicly report (de-identified):

- device-related discipline by disability status/IEP/504

## **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

- repeated removals of students with disabilities for device violations
- instructional time lost due to device enforcement

Without data, inequity stays invisible.

### **Closing**

SB0079 is being framed as a simple “kids on phones” issue. In special education, it becomes an **access and equity** issue. A policy that increases discipline without disability guardrails will predictably harm students with disabilities and fuel conflict between families and schools.

I urge a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** vote to ensure disability access, safety, and protections are explicitly built into enforcement.

Respectfully submitted,

**Alicia Baines**

Maryland Parent & Special Education Advocate

## **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

### **Why Student Device Restrictions Impact Students With Disabilities**

**Bill:** SB0079 – Student Technology Use Policy

**Purpose of this attachment:** Explain how device restrictions can unintentionally limit access for students with disabilities and increase conflict when safeguards are not explicit.

#### **Why this matters**

For many students with disabilities, personal devices are not “phones for fun.” They can function as **assistive technology, communication support, health/safety tools, or executive functioning supports**. If policies are enforced rigidly, schools may unintentionally create barriers to access and increase avoidable discipline incidents.

#### **Real examples of disability-related device use**

##### **1) Communication (AAC)**

- Speech-generating communication apps
- Picture-to-speech tools
- Typing-to-speak supports  
*Impact if restricted:* student may be unable to communicate needs, distress, or safety concerns in real time.

##### **2) Assistive Technology (AT) for learning**

- Text-to-speech / speech-to-text
- Audiobooks and reading supports
- Writing supports and accessibility tools  
*Impact if restricted:* student loses access to curriculum and may fall behind or experience increased frustration behaviors.

##### **3) Executive Functioning supports (EF)**

- Timers, reminders, visual schedules
- Task initiation/completion prompts
- Self-regulation tools (structured coping prompts)  
*Impact if restricted:* increased dysregulation, missed transitions, and escalation that may

## **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

be mislabeled as “defiance.”

### **4) Health and medical monitoring**

- Diabetes monitoring alerts (CGM-related notifications)
- Seizure alerts or other documented health supports
- Medication reminders (when part of a documented plan)  
*Impact if restricted:* health and safety risk, delayed response, and preventable emergencies.

### **5) Safety needs (including elopement risk)**

- Safety check-ins when included in a plan
- Location/safety supports used to prevent wandering risk  
*Impact if restricted:* increased risk during a crisis event or safety incident.

### **Where conflict and “abuse of power” shows up**

Even with exceptions listed, problems happen when:

- staff are not trained to recognize disability-related device use, or
- enforcement relies on discretion without a clear disability-first standard, or
- discipline is applied before checking IEP/504 accommodations or documented needs.

This can lead to:

- unnecessary removals from instruction
- increased disputes between families and schools
- inconsistent enforcement across schools and students
- avoidable barriers for students who already face access gaps

## **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

### **What protects students and reduces conflict**

To ensure SB0079 improves learning conditions without harming students with disabilities, policies should include:

- **Clear disability-first enforcement:** IEP/504 needs and documented supports must be considered before discipline.
- **Training:** staff training on AAC/assistive technology and disability-related supports.
- **Parent notice + rapid correction path:** a quick process to resolve disputes when a device is used for access/health/safety.
- **Data transparency:** districts track device-related discipline impacts by disability status to monitor equity.

**Key takeaway:** A policy can reduce distractions *and* protect students with disabilities—but only if safeguards are explicit, enforceable, and implemented consistently.

# Support

Uploaded by: Betsy Tao

Position: FWA

## **SB79 - County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements**

*Written Testimony (Favorable With Amendments)*

Submitted By: Betsy Tao, MCCPTA & Distraction Free Schools Maryland

Dear Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,

My name is Betsy Tao and I am a parent of two daughters attending Montgomery County Public Schools, in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. I am also the Chair of the Technology Committee of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, where I advocate for issues relating to the impacts of technology on learning in MCPS schools, including the negative impacts of addictive personal devices. In addition, I am a parent volunteer with the Distraction Free Schools Policy Project, which is a joint project with national organizations working on phones-in-schools legislation across the country.

I am grateful to Senator Benson for continuing to put forward a phones-in-schools bill this session. Maryland is only one of four states [earning an “F” grade](#) for not having any legislation requiring a policy relating to the use of personal mobile devices – including addictive smartphones – in schools. HB163 as written would get Maryland to a “C” grade, but I think Maryland can do better. I strongly recommend a bill like HB163 with amendments that would move Maryland to an “A”.

Such a bill would prohibit the use of personal mobile devices throughout the entire instructional day – including transition times, lunch, and recess - as SB79 does, but for K-12 rather than just K-8. Some believe that high schools are of an age where they need to learn to manage their devices, but I disagree. Surveys show that [almost 50% of adults admit to being addicted to their devices](#). Surveys also show that [teenagers spend on average 8 plus hours on screens for passive entertainment a day](#), and average screen time is even higher for certain demographics, such as students from low-income households, black, and Hispanic students. The school day is the only time where many children can get a break from addictive devices in order to learn, and that’s as true for high school students as well as elementary and middle school students.

An “A” bill would also require school districts to include their policies storage options that ensure devices are inaccessible to students during the instructional school day. School districts can retain the discretion to device which storage solution works with their operating budgets, as options range for higher-cost options like phone lockers, to low-cost options like storing devices in the first or last period class in a locked cabinet or closet. Numerous studies by neuroscientists and psychologists show that *where* the device is stored is just as important as whether a policy exists, including findings from [Dr. Angela Duckworth’s Phones-in-Focus Study, which received over 7000 responses from Maryland Educators](#). Studies also show the stricter the policy, the happier the educator, which makes sense to anyone inside a school. Failure to mandate storage just means enforcement will fall to teachers, leading to teacher burnout, inconsistent or lack of enforcement, disciplinary issues, safety issues, and more.

Finally, an “A” bill would contain exceptions for documented IEPs, 504 plans, and medical needs, but not for instructional use or most importantly, emergencies. The National Association of School Resource Officers has come out strongly in favor of a strict phone policy, noting that phones may allow some parents to *feel* more safe, but they make students less safe. I have had conversations with MCPS leaders who confirm this to be true.

The investments that Maryland is making to improve educational outcomes, such as investing in literacy coaching, will have limited impact if technology continues to be a distraction to learning. Removing addictive personal mobile devices from the school environment, where they never should have been introduced, is an important first step. Proficiency rates for English and math continue to fall; an astonishing low percentage of graduates are college and career ready; post-secondary stakeholders continue to report that graduates are showing up on college campuses and workplaces without basic cognitive and non-cognitive skills. In the age of rampant artificial intelligence, we have to ensure that our students are armed with the skills necessary to navigate this quickly shifting landscape, and the core skills have not changed: strong cognitive reasoning; strong reading and writing ability; socio-emotional and relationship skills. Technology – especially smartphones – have proven to be major obstacle to students developing these skills, and schools remain the one place where phone-free policies can have a significant positive impact on *all* students.

**SB79\_MSEA\_Lamb\_FWA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lauren Lamb

Position: FWA

**FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**  
**Senate Bill 79**  
**County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy -**  
**Requirements**

**Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment**  
**February 4, 2026**

**Lauren Lamb**  
**Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports, with amendments, Senate Bill 79, which would require a county board of education to develop and adopt a policy to restrict or limit the use of personal electronic devices by students during school hours, with certain exceptions to accommodate health or educational needs. It would also require the policy to be published on the county board's website and in student handbooks.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 44 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

A 2024 poll of NEA members showed that 90 percent support school policies prohibiting the use of cell phones during instructional time.<sup>1</sup> Why such overwhelming support? Of those same educators, 83 percent report that students are having difficulty concentrating and completing assignments, trends which experts say correlate with increased access to cell phones.<sup>2 3</sup> These concerns are not limited to teenagers. Even elementary and middle school students have considerable daily screen time – according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, U.S. children ages 8-

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<sup>1</sup> National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> How Phones Ruin Concentration. Child Mind Institute (2024). <https://childmind.org/article/kids-shouldnt-use-phones-during-homework/#:~:text=Multitasking%20leads%20to%20shallower%20thinking,Clinical%20Expert:%20Matthew%20Cruger%2C%20PhD>

12 are using devices or in front of screens for an average of 4-6 hours each day.<sup>4</sup>

It is impractical and often ineffective to enforce restrictions on cell phone usage when policies vary on a classroom-by-classroom basis. Enforcement must not be left up to individual educators; rather, schools need widely observed norms led by system leaders and administrators. We therefore encourage the following amendments:

- (1) Expand policies to apply bell-to-bell for all grade levels – meaning, from the start of the school day to the end of the day without exceptions for passing periods or lunch – to promote clear and enforceable expectations about when devices should be stored out of sight.
- (2) Clarify that the school administration is responsible for enforcing the policy. School administrators should seek stakeholder input to develop student compliance plans and provide support for educators and staff toward the effective implementation of the policy.
- (3) Ensure that countywide policies are crafted in partnership with local bargaining units and community stakeholders, and that all policies include thoughtful, routinely updated plans for family communication and emergency response.<sup>5</sup>

**With the inclusion of these amendments, we would urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 79.**

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<sup>4</sup> Screen Time and Children. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2024). [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> Sample Policy Limiting Personal Device Use in Schools. National Education Association (2025). [https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/sample-policy-limiting-personal-device-use-in-schools\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/sample-policy-limiting-personal-device-use-in-schools_final_0.pdf)

## **Testimony**

Uploaded by: Lindsay Unger

Position: FWA

My name is Lindsay Unger and I am a parent of two children in the Howard County Public School System. As a system of public education, I believe the State has an obligation to make every effort to protect the wellbeing, development, and education of our children. Allowing students K-12 to have access to cell phones and other personal devices during school hours, inclusive of between classes and lunch, violates this principle and I hope to surface reasoning to support a strong personal device bill.

Think back to your high school experience - imagine sitting in class, socializing at lunch, meeting friends in the halls - and now consider how many of us are attached to our phones as adults. We look down when it buzzes, we read while walking between rooms, we multitask in the bathroom, we communicate constantly. Imagine if you had this huge distraction at school. Why put this stress and strain on the attention span of our kids? Why not preserve school as a safe space to focus on their education and as a place to build strong, supportive connections with their peers and teachers.

There are countless publications all pointing toward the same conclusion and I will reference a few. As key decision makers in this process, I hope you have read the book "The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Haidt. Haidt makes many key points about the impacts of the digitization of childhood focusing primarily on cell phone use. Chapter 11 speaks to how the rapid adoption of smartphones and their acceptance in schools has fueled distraction, cyberbullying, and conflict among students. Removing cell phones from schools is one of the key pillars of his recommendation for counteracting the negative effects that a phone-based childhood has had on Gen Z.

The National Education Association conducted a survey in spring 2024 of 2,889 members working in elementary, middle, and high schools. The published report shows that, "Educators who work in schools that allow personal device use find it very disruptive. An overwhelming majority of NEA members—90 percent—support school policy prohibiting cell phone/personal devices during instructional time, and 83 percent support prohibiting cell phone/personal device usage during the entire school day with exceptions for things like medical or assistive-technology needs." One more that I will highlight is Adrian Ward et. al's 2017 paper called "Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity". I think the title alone speaks to the point.

As for the case for safety, I hope you all take the time to read the studies that show that while devices potentially may make students and parents *feel* safer when it comes to mass physical threats, in practice, they are negatively impacting the safety of all students in school-wide emergencies, causing misinformation, additional panic, and network congestion. In October 2025, the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) issued [a statement](#) that supports school policies and legislation that bar cell phone access for K-12 students during instructional time.

Cell phones are a tool for communication. They are not built for education. Smartphones are mini computers connecting students to everything outside of their classroom when what matters most during school hours is their connection to their teachers and immediate classmates. Any allotted use in schools, apart from IEP/504 exceptions, would be inequitable to those without access to the device/app.

As this is a matter of public health and safety, the State must put forth legislation that is determined fully by evidence-based research. It is the experts in neuroscience, child development, and safety whose input should be weighted the most. Fortunately, though, where policies have been put in place, there have been very positive outcomes. The Institute for Families & Technology conducted a [Public Opinion Survey](#) on Voters' Views of Phones in Schools. 91% of parents whose children are in schools with bell-to-ball bans support the policy.

The parameters of the policy must be strictly set at the state-level to ensure an equitable experience across counties - not reliant on differing levels of awareness and education on the topic. I am advocating for K-12 legislation that requires cell phones, and other similar personal devices, NOT to be on the person (inaccessible) from bell-to-bell, only with exception for IEP/504 requirements. Without these specific parameters, the legislation leaves too many children without health and safety guardrails that are critical to their education success. Please take this opportunity to make a tremendous difference in the lives of Maryland children.

# **Maryland Youth Advisory Council\_ Letter of Support**

Uploaded by: O'Marie Barnes

Position: FWA

## Maryland Youth Advisory Council

Annapolis, Maryland

February 2, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

The **Maryland Youth Advisory Council (MYAC)** serves as the official voice of Maryland's youth, advising the Governor and the General Assembly on the issues that define our educational and social experiences. We are writing to provide **favorable testimony on Senate Bill 0079 with amendments**.

The Council shares the committee's concern regarding the impact of digital distractions on student mental health and academic performance. However, as currently drafted, the broad definition of "personal electronic devices" threatens to deepen the digital divide and disproportionately harm students in low-income communities.

Seven years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are still circulating the same hardware distributed during the initial 1:1 rollout. These devices are frequently in a state of disrepair—suffering from hardware failure and software obsolescence. Because many districts impose replacement fees as high as **\$300**, many students from low-income families are unable to repair school-issued laptops. These students rely on their personal devices to ensure their coursework is completed and their grades do not suffer.

While the bill allows for an exception for "educational purposes" under the direction of an administrator or educator, this creates a standard of **discretionary access**. A student's ability to engage with the curriculum should not be subject to an individual instructor's preference. If a teacher prohibits the use of a personal laptop, a student with a broken school device is effectively locked out of the digital classroom, creating an inequitable learning environment.

To address these concerns while still achieving the bill's goals, the Council urges the committee to **amend the scope of SB0079 to limit cellular devices (smartphones) strictly**.

1. **Target the Distraction:** Modern research identifies smartphones and social media notifications as the primary drivers of classroom distraction, rather than laptops or tablets used for note-taking and research.
2. **Protect Academic Continuity:** By exempting laptops and tablets, the State ensures that students whose school-issued devices are failing can still use their own functional technology to learn without fear of confiscation or disciplinary action.

Maryland's youth are committed to a focused learning environment, but that focus must be supported by equitable access to technology. We respectfully request a **favorable with amendments** report on SB0079.

Sincerely,

**The Maryland Youth Advisory Council**

# **Testimony SB 79 - County Boards of Education - Stu**

Uploaded by: Dawana Sterrette

Position: UNF

**Testimony of the  
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners  
Senate Bill 79 –  
In Opposition of - County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements**

**February 4, 2026**

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners revised its electronic device policy (Board Policy JICJ) in April 2025. Under the new policy, students' personal devices must be turned off, put away, and secured during the school day. Students may use their personal device if needed as part of their IEP/Section 504 plan, for documented health reasons, or when given teacher permission for instructional purposes. This proposed legislation is largely consistent with Board Policy JICJ, therefore it is not needed.

While City Schools is broadly supportive of legislation to limit the impact of student cell phones during the school day, it is imperative that no statewide effort limit the ability of school systems to adopt more restrictive policies based on local needs and community feedback. City Schools updated its policy after an extensive, year-long pilot program in 25 schools (costing approximately \$175,000) and extensive outreach to families and students. Feedback gathered during the pilot program informed the policy language that was ultimately adopted.

Local school systems are in the best position to know what processes and procedures would work best for their school communities and state legislation should not limit how school systems are able to respond to the challenges that student cell phone use pose to the learning environment. Additionally, City Schools already has an established cadence for reviewing its policies. A state-mandated review timeline of every two years would conflict with this established cadence and impose an additional burden on school system resources by requiring a policy to be reviewed when a review may not be necessary.

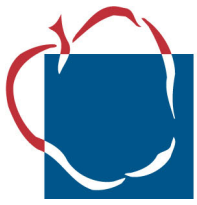
For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners opposes Senate Bill 79 and urges an unfavorable report.

Dawana Merritt Sterrette, Esq.  
Executive Director, Legislative and Government Affairs  
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners  
443-250-0190

# **SB79 OPPOSE.pdf**

Uploaded by: Grace Wilson

Position: UNF



## **SB0079 – COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – STUDENT TECHNOLOGY USE POLICY – REQUIREMENTS**

February 4, 2026

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

### **OPPOSE**

Grace Wilson, Director of Legislation & Policy (410.440.1758)

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB0079 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**. This bill requires each county board to develop and adopt a policy prohibiting or limiting the use of personal electronic devices by students during school hours. The policy must prohibit the use of personal electronic devices during school hours for elementary and middle school students and limit the use of personal electronic devices during school hours for high school students. Such a policy may not prohibit a student from using a personal electronic device: (1) for any purpose documented in the student’s individualized education program or Section 504 plan; (2) to monitor or address a student’s documented health issue; or (3) when directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes.

The required policy must be published on the county board’s website, published in the school’s student handbook, and reviewed every two years by the Maryland State Department of Education (elementary and middle) and local board (high). Finally, each county board is required to establish policies and procedures to enforce the policy established, including appropriate disciplinary measures for violations.

AACPS opposes this bill which would infringe upon local control of educational policy regarding student use of cell phones. Local governance by boards of education is essential to a comprehensive system of public education. Retaining local board authority allows for collaboration and cooperative planning within the local community rather than through top-down decisions from the State. In fact, Section 4-101 of the Education Law Article states, “educational matters that affect the counties shall be under the control of a county board of education,” and that local boards of education, “determine, with the advice of the county Superintendent, the educational policies of the county school system.” Local boards of education receive and rely on public input to best address local needs. The relationship between the community and local public schools encourages participation by parents/guardians and other community members in the educational process so that everyone has responsibility for and ownership of public education. Retaining decision-making authority at the local level allows local boards of education to best balance educational practices, available resources to implement those practices, public input, and accountability.

Furthermore, the Board of Education of Anne Arundel County and the Superintendent have already adopted a policy and regulation governing student use of cell phones, Policy JCO and Regulation JCO-RA – Use of Personal Electronic Communication devices by Students. In addition to this policy and regulation, AACPS has adopted student cell phone guidelines which further restrict student cell phone use. Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on SB0079.

# **SB 79 - Oppose - County Boards of Education - Stud**

Uploaded by: Jessica Goff

Position: UNF



621 Ridgely Avenue, Suite 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-5414 · 800-841-8197 · Fax: 410-841-6580 · MABE.org

**BILL:** SB 79  
**TITLE:** County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements  
**HEARING DATE:** February 4, 2026  
**POSITION:** UNFAVORABLE  
**COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy, Environment  
**CONTACT:** Jessica Goff, Governmental Affairs Associate (jgoff@mabe.org)

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, **opposes Senate Bill 79 County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements.**

Senate Bill 79 requires that each county board develop and adopt a policy prohibiting or limiting the use of personal electronic devices by students during school hours. The bill provides that the policies must prohibit the use of personal electronic devices in elementary and middle schools and must limit the use of personal electronic devices in high schools. There are limited exceptions: for a purpose documented in a student's individualized education program or 504 plan; for monitoring or addressing a student's documented health issue; or when directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes. The bill further requires establishing enforcement policies and procedures, as well as disciplinary actions for violations.

While MABE appreciates the intent of the bill to improve conditions for teaching and learning, MABE believes that the decision on whether and how to adopt such a policy should be the responsibility of each local board of education. MABE believes that legislation which limits local board decision-making authority (like prescribing whether to have, or the content of, a student technology use policy) weakens the county board's bond with the local community and adversely impacts the community's participation in the governance and operation of their local school system.

Importantly, a 2025 Department of Legislative Services (DLS) [Issue Paper](#) states, "According to the Maryland State Department of Education, 19 [local school systems] recently updated their cell phone policies, and the remaining 5 LSS are currently reviewing or updating their policies." The same report notes that "while the concerns about the impacts of student cell phone use in schools on student learning, behavior, and mental health are compelling, the effectiveness of new laws and policies restricting their use remains uncertain... Fifty-six percent of parents believed students should be allowed to use their cell phones in schools, even during class time if approved by the teacher. Only



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32% of parents support a total cell phone ban in school, even if the policy has exceptions for health or student support purposes.” This disparity only further emphasizes that the specific policies are best left up to the county boards who are most responsive to the communities they serve.

Because the majority of Maryland’s school systems have existing policies on student technology use, and because these decisions are best left to the local boards of education that are most responsive to the individual needs of their communities, MABE respectfully requests an unfavorable report on SB 79.

# **SB 79 County Boards of Education - Elementary and**

Uploaded by: Mary Pat Fannon

Position: UNF



**Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director**  
1217 S. Potomac Street  
Baltimore, MD 21224  
410-935-7281  
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

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**BILL:** SB 79

**TITLE:** County Boards of Education - Elementary and Middle Schools - Student Technology Use Policy

**DATE:** February 4, 2026

**POSITION:** Unfavorable

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**CONTACT:** Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

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The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents **opposes** Senate Bill 79.

This bill requires county boards of education to develop and adopt a policy that prohibits elementary and middle school students from using a cellular phone or personal electronic device during school hours. Such policy may not prohibit a student from using a cellular device for any purpose documented in the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 Plan, to monitor or address a student's health issue, or when directed by an educator or administrator for educational purposes.

Maryland superintendents appreciate the good intentions of this bill; however, PSSAM steadfastly opposes any legislation that imposes statewide mandates on local school systems or local boards of education, especially on policies that have previously been deliberated at the local level with all affected stakeholders, such as the case regarding student uses of cell phones.

In the past several years, superintendents, school boards and advisory groups in every Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have taken proactive action to establish, update, or study district-wide cell phone policies. These efforts include establishing new policies specific to the use of cell phones, updating board policies, revising the district's code of conduct or student handbook regarding the use of technology to include cell phones or "smart" technology, and/or introducing pilot programs. Much of the local work in establishing these policies was aided through surveys to parents, teachers, and students, as well as extensive public meetings.

In addition, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) convened a broad workgroup of stakeholders in 2025, including several superintendents, to study this issue. We strongly supported this workgroup and its on-the-ground membership. The workgroup anchored its work in national research and partnered with Phones in Focus who have initiated a national study based on educator input regarding best practices around the county. More importantly, the workgroup used the experiences of the local school districts who have already delved deep in their communities to determine the appropriate use of cell phones and “smart technology” in classrooms and schools.

PSSAM remains committed to focusing on empowering local decision-making to ensure education policies that are relevant, flexible, and reflective of the unique needs of each community. Again, we appreciate the bill’s good intentions, but ask the Legislature to allow the education experts at the state and local level to enact and enforce the most effective public policies.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** Senate Bill 79 and kindly requests an **unfavorable** report.

# **Montgomery County Board of Education\_SB 79\_Oppose.**

Uploaded by: Patricia Ursprung

Position: UNF



# MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

*Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential*

15 West Gude Drive ♦ Suite 100 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850

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**BILL:** SB 79

**TITLE:** County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements

**DATE:** February 4, 2026

**POSITION:** Oppose

**COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy, and the Environment

**CONTACT:** Patricia Ursprung, Coordinator, Legislative Affairs

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The Montgomery County Board of Education opposes Senate Bill 79.

This bill requires local education agencies (LEAs) to establish a policy restricting the use of personal electronic devices by students during the school day.

On August 21, 2025, the Montgomery County Board of Education adopted a legislative platform that contains priority issues and ongoing concerns. One of the ongoing concerns is preserving local autonomy. Based on this platform position, the Montgomery County Board of Education opposes legislation that would infringe on local control. Bills that fall into this category require specific school system action and may impact areas such as school calendars, school start times, curriculum, testing, procurement, and other operational decision-making.

Senate Bill 79 infringes on local control by requiring all LEAs to have the same policy on use of personal electronic devices during school hours. This directive removes the Board or administration's ability to determine what is best for Montgomery County Public Schools as a whole, and individual schools therein.

Because Senate Bill 79 infringes on local control, the Board opposes this bill pursuant to its adopted platform and urges an **unfavorable** report.

**SB0079 Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: William Androne

Position: UNF



## **County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements**

*Wednesday, February 4, 2026*

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

**UNFAVORABLE**

The Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils (CRASC) requests an unfavorable report on SB0079.

The Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils (CRASC) is the representative organization of all students enrolled in the secondary schools of AACPS, dedicated to elevating youth voice and promoting student leadership.

By requiring each county's Board of Education to adopt a policy restricting students' personal device usage during school hours. Completely prohibiting it for elementary and middle schools and severely limiting it for high schoolers, with exceptions. SB0079 goes against CRASC's platform, which explicitly supports "A student's right to possess and use cellular devices during school hours at the teacher's discretion" (Plank VII, C) as well as "The use of social media and modern technology for educational purposes" (Plank VII, D). This mandate conflicts with CRASC's platform on device usage in the classroom, which outlines that device usage should be monitored and managed by the teacher and used in a context that is guided by the educator, rather than an overall restriction that removes flexibility for teachers and students.

Additionally, CRASC opposes "The restriction of social media sites and electronic devices during student recreational periods, including lunch"(Plank VII, B Opposes). SB0079 would mandate counties to create a policy prohibiting or severely restricting device use during these times. These recreational periods are ones where students often coordinate group projects, clubs, transportation, and other family obligations that may arise. Establishing these broad restrictions undermines the positive use that technology can hold in learning and developing leadership skills in students.

Accordingly, the Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils respectfully requests an unfavorable report on SB0079 from the committee.

Thank you,



William Andrione, *Secretary of Legislation*

Alma Naghedi, Vivi Chin, and Veda Puvvala, *Legislative Liaisons*

**SB0079. The Arc Maryland. LOI.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ande Kolp

Position: INFO



SB0079: County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements

February 4, 2026

**Letter of Information**

The Arc Maryland is a statewide training, support, and advocacy organization that is dedicated to advancing and preserving the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

This bill would require a county board of education to develop and adopt a policy on the use of personal electronic devices during school hours, requiring the policy to restrict or limit the use of personal electronic devices by students during school hours except for any purpose documented in the student's education program or Section 504 plan, to monitor or address a student's health issue, or for certain educational purposes, and require the policy to be published on the county board's website and in student handbooks.

**Although this bill attempts to carve out an exception for students with disabilities, and this understanding is very much appreciated, we believe that carve-outs like this have the potential to do more damage than good: they amplify stigma and unconscious bias of students with disabilities that create obstacles to inclusion and belonging for students with disabilities.**

One way IEP and 504 teams work together to identify the least restrictive and best assistive technology options for students with disabilities is to identify devices and tech that students are already using, in and outside of the education environment. When students use existing technology such as smart phones as their communication devices, productivity or reading apps, checklists, timers, and more, they often feel more comfortable utilizing their accommodations and assistive technology to effectively access their education program.

If school systems restrict cell phone use for students without disabilities and only allow use for students with disabilities, this could increase the stigma students with disabilities can encounter when they are treated differently, and could jeopardize the confidentiality of a disabling condition that a student with a disability has a right to rely on.

Ande Kolp, Executive Director  
[www.thearcmd.org](http://www.thearcmd.org)

**FINAL\_GOC Letter of Information (SB79).pdf**

Uploaded by: Andrea Barnes

Position: INFO

**February 4, 2026**

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman  
Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Senate Bill (SB) 79 - County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements - Letter of Information**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The Governor's Office for Children (the Office) respectfully submits this letter of information for Senate Bill 79 - County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements. SB 79 would require each county board of education to develop and implement a policy prohibiting the use of personal electronic devices, including cell phones, by a student during the school day except under certain circumstances (Individualized Education Programs or Section 504 Plans; documented health issues; and specific educational purposes directed by an educator). SB 79 would require elementary and middle schools to implement a school hours prohibition and a limitation on usage of devices in high school and maintain local school district authority on how to implement the prohibitions and restrictions.

Research indicates that the use of cell phones has a negative impact on students' academic performance, mental health, and social development. Over 40% of public schools across the nation report that unauthorized device use moderately or severely disrupts learning.<sup>1</sup> The Office appreciates that this bill prioritizes academic engagement and limits distractions within schools and classrooms.

In addition, many students' social media use is linked to increased anxiety and depression.<sup>2</sup> Cell phones can be used for cyberbullying, which nine in ten public schools report experiencing. Excessive cell phone use is associated with loneliness and can deter students from socializing and building relationships with their peers.<sup>3</sup>

About 30 states and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws or policies that establish a base level of limitation on student cell phone use in K-12 schools. Research indicates that "bell to bell"

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<sup>1</sup><https://nces.ed.gov/learn/press-release/more-half-public-school-leaders-say-cell-phones-hurt-academic-performance>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.kff.org/affordable-care-act/a-look-at-state-efforts-to-ban-cellphones-in-schools-and-implications-for-youth-mental-health/>

<sup>3</sup>See footnote 1

restrictions where phones are prohibited during the school day hours can reduce<sup>4</sup> unexcused absences and provide the most comprehensive<sup>5</sup> environment for focus and social interaction compared to instructional-time only bans. In a January 2026 survey, Brookings found that 90% of adults and nearly 80% of teens support restrictions on cell phone use in school.<sup>6</sup>

Studies also suggest that disciplinary guidelines are most effective when they are tiered and follow progressive discipline protocols, including parent/guardian communication and intervention, rather than relying solely on exclusionary discipline.<sup>7</sup>

The Governor's Office for Children requests that the committee consider this information on school day device prohibitions and tiered discipline protocols as it deliberates this and other related legislation regarding personal electronic devices in schools. Thank you for your consideration.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Andrea Barnes, Policy Advisor and Manager of Legislative Affairs at [andrea.barnes@maryland.gov](mailto:andrea.barnes@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,



Carmel Martin,  
Special Secretary, Governor's Office for Children and Senior Advisor to the Governor for Policy

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<sup>4</sup> <https://edworkingpapers.com/ai25-1315>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.future-ed.org/qa-angela-duckworth-on-effective-school-cell-phone-policies/>

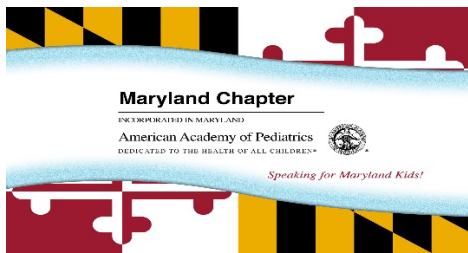
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/survey-parents-and-teens-support-school-cellphone-bans-and-most-dont-perceive-major-downsides/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://edworkingpapers.com/policy-practice-series/ai25-1315>

# **SB0079\_LOI\_MDAAP\_CBOE - Student Technology Use Pol**

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: INFO



Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 4, 2026

Senate Bill 79 – *County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements*

**LETTER OF INFORMATION**

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of information for Senate Bill 79.

As pediatricians, we are deeply committed to promoting the health and well-being of children and adolescents. We know from both research and clinical experience that the use of cell phones in schools presents complex challenges, including impacts on academic focus, mental health, and peer relationships. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has developed a **Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies**, which we encourage this Committee to review as it explores policy solutions. The guide offers evidence-based recommendations on the role of cell phones in schools and strategies for balancing educational needs with the realities of technology in students' lives. The resource can be accessed here: [Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies](#)

We also wish to draw your attention to a specific concern regarding proposed legislation that includes "health" exemptions to school phone use restrictions. While we understand the intent to support students with documented medical conditions, such provisions, if broadly defined, could unintentionally burden pediatricians and other healthcare providers with an influx of appointment requests from families seeking exemptions for their children to retain phone access. This could divert critical time and resources away from other essential healthcare needs. To mitigate this risk, we recommend that any proposed exemptions include clear and specific criteria for medical necessity. We also suggest working collaboratively with schools, healthcare providers, and families to ensure policies are both practical and equitable in implementation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your commitment to the well-being of Maryland's children.

**For more information call:**

Christine K. Krone

J. Steven Wise

Danna L. Kauffman

410-244-7000

**SB 79 - State Board & MSDE - LOI.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Laurel Cratsley

Position: INFO

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**TO:** Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

**BILL:** Senate Bill (SB) 79: County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements

**DATE:** February 4, 2026

**POSITION:** Letter of Information

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The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) would like to share the following information regarding SB 79, which would require county boards of education to develop, adopt, and publish a policy prohibiting or limiting the use of personal electronic devices during school hours, except under certain circumstances. MSDE would be responsible for reviewing such policies for elementary and middle schools every two years.

The State Board and MSDE appreciate the intent of this bill to prioritize our students' academic engagement and to limit distractions within their schools and classrooms. We concur that every elementary, middle, and high school should have a clear, consistent, and research-informed policy to guide the use of electronic devices in schools.

To that end, we are pleased to share a summary of the work MSDE and the State Board have engaged in since the 2025 legislative session, including the recommendations of the [Task Force on Cell Phone Use in Schools](#), the state's ongoing participation in a national research initiative that surveys Maryland educators on their experience with student cell phone use, and State Board and MSDE's analysis of local education agencies' (LEAs) policies that informed the passage of the State Board's August 2025 resolution on the issue.

The Task Force, which was convened in the first months of 2025, was composed of a diverse group of stakeholders from across the state, including teachers, administrators, parents, students, principals, and district superintendents, collectively representing 11 counties and all grade bands. This broad representation ensured that the guidance reflected a wide range of perspectives and school contexts.

The Task Force developed research-informed, actionable guidance to support LEAs in strengthening the implementation of cell phone use policies. The [guidance](#) emphasizes increasing opportunities for stakeholder engagement to build enduring community support, developing cohesive policies that consider the needs of all student groups, utilizing evidence-based approaches to discipline for policy infractions, building emergency preparedness procedures that align with cell phone restrictions, and supporting districts in addressing practical implementation challenges. Importantly, the Task Force did not seek to mandate a single, uniform policy across the state. Instead, flexibility was prioritized to allow

each district to design policies reflective of its unique community needs.

As the Task Force's work concluded, the Department was approached to participate in the national research initiative, Phones in Focus, which to date has surveyed nearly 9,000 Maryland educators and administrators during the 2024–25 and 2025–26 school years. Preliminary findings indicate that more elementary and middle schools adopted bell-to-bell cell phone policies this school year, while adoption of such policies in high schools remained flat or declined slightly. Further, across all grade bands, the majority of schools with educators who completed the survey currently operate under no-show cell phone storage policies, though this storage option ranks relatively low in teacher satisfaction, with 59 percent reporting satisfaction. Teachers reported much higher satisfaction with other student cell phone storage options, including 81 percent who were satisfied with locker storage, 84 percent satisfied with centralized collection, and 92 percent satisfied with a policy that did not allow cell phones on campus.

Additionally, during the summer of 2025, the Department again partnered with Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM) to survey nearly all LEAs regarding their cell phone and electronic device policies. At the time, 18 LEAs had some version of a bell-to-bell policy in place. For seven LEAs, this policy extends to elementary, middle, and high schools. However, for ten LEAs, bell-to-bell restrictions were in place only in elementary and/or middle schools. Those same ten LEAs have adopted schedule-based restrictions for their high school students.

[Informed by the findings](#) and results from the Phones in Focus surveys as well as our LEA-level survey, the State Board passed a [resolution](#) in August 2025 outlining its approach to cell phone use in schools. The resolution highlights the Task Force guidance, notes that nearly all Maryland LEAs already have a cell phone policy in place, and encourages all LEAs to maintain and regularly revisit comprehensive policies aligned with the priorities identified by the Task Force.

The State Board and the Department request that the committee consider this information as it deliberates SB 79. Thank you for your attention to this important work and for your continued commitment to supporting effective, locally responsive school policies.

Please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, [laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov](mailto:laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov), or Hannah Oakley, Deputy Director of the State Board, at [hannah.oakley@maryland.gov](mailto:hannah.oakley@maryland.gov), if you would like any additional information.