

MD 0928 testimony - Abigail Marsh.pdf

Uploaded by: Abigail Marsh

Position: FAV

My name is Abigail Marsh. I speak as a Maryland public school parent and a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Georgetown University who [specializes in socio-emotional development in adolescents](#).

I am convinced the evidence is clear that cell phones must be banned in K-12 school settings from bell to bell.

First, phones interfere with learning. They create a constant distraction. The average student receives [50 notifications every day during school](#). Test scores have plateaued or [dropped](#) since the introduction of phones. Students are learning less, as would anyone constantly distracted while trying to listen, read, and concentrate. Teenagers *cannot be taught to manage this distraction* because their [brains are not yet developed](#) enough.

Second, phones interfere with social and emotional learning. What is sadder than a table full of teens sitting [silent and hunched over phones](#) when they should be talking and laughing together? Passing period and lunch are when teens get the majority of their daily opportunities to practice social and emotional skills, which can **only** be learned through practice. Employers now report recent many college graduates [can't make eye contact](#) in a conversation. Guess why?

Third, phones interfere with safety. Fights and vandalism in schools are coordinated via phone and then filmed and [posted to social media](#) on phones. Removing the phones cuts down on both fights and vandalism, as a [Today Show episode](#) about DCPS's Hardy MS recently reported.

Fourth, this is an equity issue. Top regional private schools already [ban phones](#) bell to bell. Maryland public school students will be left further behind their more privileged peers in terms of their academic outcomes and socio-emotional development unless Maryland leaders take action.

Fifth, this is what teachers want by overwhelming margins! [83% of teachers](#) in a recent NEA poll want phones banned bell-to-bell.

Our teachers know the right answer. Schools around the world, including those in [27 U.S. states and the District of Columbia](#) have banned phones bell to bell. Lawmakers in these states have recognized that it is far past time we stopped permitting technology companies to run what is in effect a massive, uncontrolled, profit-driven experiment on our children that is, according to a [growing body of scientific evidence](#), causing significant and widespread harm to their cognitive abilities, educational outcomes, and mental health.

Don't let Maryland public school students get left behind.

Professor Abigail Marsh
Department of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Program in Neuroscience
Georgetown University

Lerner_SB928 - County Boards of Education - Studen

Uploaded by: Alana Lerner

Position: FAV

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted By: 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, joining over 1,000 other Maryland parents eager for phone-free schools. 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 testifying fully in favor of Senator Harris' bill 928, the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act. Maryland is one of only a handful of states without any legislation regarding phones and social media in school. Frankly, we are falling behind. I thank Senator Harris and the bill's co-sponsors for their leadership in proposing a thorough bill to prohibit K-12 students from using personal devices during the instructional day. I was also grateful to hear that the Senator intends to amend SB928 to remove exceptions for emergency use and add language to ensure devices are inaccessible during the school day. These are important additions to ensure schools are places of focused learning and hubs of social-emotional development.

As a parent, I want school to be a place of bustling social connection and learning – a safe haven for my kids to practice how to engage with peers in the real world. Sadly, a recent study showed that teens check their smartphones more than 100 times per day, with 97 percent reporting use during school hours. The future I want for my children cannot take place in device-distracted classrooms and quiet hallways filled with students staring at screens between classes. Thankfully, SB928 addresses my concerns and resets our schools as places of human connection from bell-to-bell.

As an educator, I appreciate the added inclusion of device storage and inaccessibility in the bill. Without a storage requirement, policy enforcement will unfairly fall to teachers, leading to inconsistency or non-enforcement. During my time in the classroom, spotting a phone out in class meant that 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.

Currently, I serve as a career readiness instructor for a post-secondary workforce development organization. I teach courses on networking, resume writing, interview skills, and professional etiquette to prepare 18-29 year olds for an internship with our corporate partners. The biggest piece of feedback from our students' internship managers is that this generation needs to rebuild their interpersonal and soft skills. In response to this feedback, we've recently changed our model to increase the amount of in-person programming and peer-to-peer collaborative workshops. SB928 is an opportunity to set our Maryland youth up for success not only in this moment, but also for their future. I request a favorable vote on SB928.

Written Testimony SB928_A Z Croke_03022026.pdf

Uploaded by: Amy Croke

Position: FAV

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted 3/2/2026 By: Amy Zets Croke, Montgomery County Public Schools parent

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

My name is Amy Zets Croke and I am the proud parent of two children in Montgomery County Public Schools - a second grader and a sixth grader. I joined over 1,000 other Maryland parents in signing a community letter of support for a strong phone-free schools bill, and care deeply about this issue.

I would like to thank Senators Harris, Charles, A. Washington, and Carozza for championing this important bill on student personal electronic device use. I strongly support this bill based on the amendments made to the cross-filed House Bill 525, which removed exceptions for emergency use and added language to ensure devices are inaccessible during the instructional day.

Our kids need a distraction-free learning environment, and we know that cell phones (or, we call them in our household, “pocket computers”) are an addictive and endless source of distraction - not only to learning, but to real life. Texts and alerts are distracting for adults with fully developed brains, and our children’s brains simply cannot handle this sort of temptation. *The evidence is incredibly clear and worrisome, and we cannot ignore it: we know that greater phone use is associated with lower educational achievement.*

We also know cell phones are impacting our kids’ social development - instead of chatting in between classes and at lunch, kids are head down in their phones for a quick dopamine hit that negatively impacts their mental health in the long run. My sixth grader, who does not have a phone, reports that his friends check messages and are on their phones instead of engaging in person. While we cannot address phone or screen use outside of school, we can and should address it within school for the benefit of all kids. *A phone-free school policy would create a space for all children where they are free from distraction and can learn and connect with others.*

Maryland is making a number of strong investments in education, but these will all be undermined if students are unable to focus on learning because of their pocket computers. Our kids need safe, distraction-free zones where they can learn and grow together. *We know better, and must do better.*

Senate Bill 928 provides a consistent policy for all of Maryland’s schools, responds to what the majority of parents and educators want, and, importantly, aligns with the available evidence on learning. *In short, the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act is good for our children.*

I urge you to support the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act to protect our Maryland kids’ education. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Amy Zets Croke
Silver Spring, MD

Maryland Phone Free Schools Act - Favorable Testim

Uploaded by: Anna Winthrop

Position: FAV

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted By: Anna Winthrop

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

My name is Anna Winthrop and I have two children in MCPS schools. I am also an educator, and prior to moving to Montgomery County, spent many years teaching at NYU, during which time I not only spent a great deal of time with my students, but did research on education systems and student engagement. I also happen to have a sister, Rebecca Winthrop, who is the Director of Universal Education at the Brookings Institute, and has been focusing her recent research on the use of technology in schools. While we face many challenges around technology, phone free schools are an absolute no brainer. The research is clear - these devices are built to be stronger than us and only lead to lower academic outcomes and higher incidences of mental health issues. The addictive nature of this type of technology makes it extremely challenging for students to focus and engage in school, even if the device is in a pocket or nearby and not turned on.

I was shocked that Maryland is so behind in this. It is our responsibility to create an environment where all children can thrive. Our classrooms are no exception, and a very simple step in the right direction is to pass strong phone free school legislation that does not allow for students to have access to phones or social media while at school.

I would also argue that you do not need to be an educator or researcher to understand this. I have often likened phones and social media to giving kids cocaine, making it readily available, then blaming them for becoming drug addicts instead of the best versions of themselves. It is cruel to put the blame on students and teachers for the detrimental effects of these devices. This is equally true for distractions on school sanctioned devices (which is another issue I hope the Senate will support in the future).

Please pass SB928, this is the first step in helping to free students from the distractions and harms that phone's present in a school environment. This type of legislation can be implemented easily, without need for additional funding or training of teachers and staff, and has only been shown to benefit students and schools.

I want to thank Senators Harris, Washington and Carozza for championing this important bill.

Best,
Anna Winthrop

DFS-MD Letter of Support Testimonials.pdf

Uploaded by: Betsy Tao

Position: FAV

Distraction-Free Schools



[MD Community Letter of Support](#) | Launched 11/8/25 | **1057** signed as of 3/2/26

Testimonials in Support of Phone-Free Schools.....	1
Testimonials in Support of Less Ed Tech & Chromebooks.....	21
*** Updated 3/2/26 10:30 AM ***	35

Testimonials in Support of Phone-Free Schools

This is one of the key issues of our time. Please do the right thing and support children by supporting these initiatives. Thank you.

My husband and I volunteer at our daughter’s school. During one of the socials (6th grade) young students were not talking to each other. They were on the phones. Looking down instead of dancing or talking.

My son is 13, and 75% of our disagreements are over the phone/ screen time. Even short exposures lead to addiction and aggression.

When I teach in my high school classrooms, I simply cannot compete with the addictive draw of smartphones, even as I require students to secure their phones in a storage holder on a countertop in my classroom. Most students still do not comply. For this reason, I strongly believe that students need to turn in their phones as soon as they enter the school building at the beginning of the day. Otherwise, any rules that individual teachers have in their own classrooms become, at best, erratically followed, and at worst, a demoralizing waste of energy and time.

I have observed the addictive nature of phones on children, which reduces their ability to focus and have meaningful connection with others.

Kids have to work so much harder to gain normal social skills. Heads are always down any minute they aren’t in class. Also, the teachers don’t enforce no phones during class so the current rule is useless.

My son school say they can’t get rid of access to IG bc they post things that are relevant to the students - like sports practice times. Whatever happened to email or announcement boards??!!

As an educator over the past decade and a half, I have seen students consumed in the world of their phones with negative consequences such as anxiety, bullying, and digital dependence.

I have twin 5 year old daughters and am very worried about the presence of smartphones in their classroom as they get older. I think the harms to learning, child safety, and overall mental health are significant. I also believe that this problem can only be addressed through collective action. This is an urgent problem.

At best, phones and social media distract what should happen at school IMO, but often a more negative impact happens.

My 15 year old daughter comes from her HS saying how lonely she feels - when I noted that she just came back from school, she said teens don't really engage that much during recess with each other - many use this time to catch up on their phones that are away during the class.

My observation is that there needs to be more civic engagement for both the teacher and the student.

Teachers award students with "good" classroom behavior by granting "cell phone time" at the end of class. My child does not have a cell phone and cannot participate in this supposed reward.

The story of a 19 year old student who talked regularly with chat gpt and formed a relationship with her. He ended up sharing about his depression with chat gpt and then asking her how to make a noose and then went onto commit suicide by hanging himself with the noose. Our children need to have opportunities to build real relationships during these valuable years without tech and/or AI. They need to learn about the dangers of tech/AI rather than only focus on the benefits and be inundated with tech.

In my work as a psychologist and Maryland parent, I see firsthand the harm of Maryland's delay in adopting this common sense legislation. Daily, children are exposed to harmful content in the places where we want them to focus on learning, and educators are forced to compete with algorithm-generated constant distraction. I've seen too many Maryland children negatively impacted. Please adopt this common sense legislation.

I am shocked by the things that my children hear from other kindergarteners about social media - at the age of 5, other children are already being exposed to things at home so it is vital that we protect their time at school from this exposure. At 5 years old, these children are at such a vulnerable stage of cognitive development.

I'm a parent of two middle school aged children AND a 30-year veteran public school teacher with both middle and high school experience. In my 30 years in the classroom I've seen a

devastating and terrifying shift in children's ability to regulate their emotions and attention. I believe there are many factors but the devices and their pull is too much to ask these developing brains to endure. Please enact this ban. We are at a crossroads and your decisive leadership is crucial.

I am a parent and child psychologist in Montgomery County, Maryland. The increase in child and teen mental health struggles in the last 10 years has been frightening, and much of it is related to social media use and limited face-to-face social interactions due to overuse of technology. Our youth desperately need a large chunk of their day with no smart phones to rebuild social skills and foster sustained attention while at school. Other states and countries are already making these changes and are pleased with the results. Our children deserve the same chance at a normal childhood.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that social media and phones are why several of my friends have had to hospitalize their girls for mental health reasons, why my children struggle to stay focused and why my children did not learn as much as they should have. I strongly support the full removal of tech from education until the end of high school. It's a failed experiment.

Children taping and posting fights.

I am personally seeing how social media on my phone distracts me at work. I want to make sure my kids don't have that distraction at school.

Parenting 3 former MoCo students. There is a significant body of data that shows the use of social media is very destructive for kids' sense of themselves, their safety and social status in their peer group, the broader social standards, and their exposure to violence and sexual coercion and subjugation.

Why condone it? AND the schools should absolutely NOT use it as a means of communication with students or as a tool of communication for schoolwork.

I was disappointed that Montgomery County Public Schools instituted a bell-to-bell policy for middle school, but not for high school. Beyond that, my son's middle school does not enforce this policy, despite having been one of the pilot schools of a bell-to-bell policy last year. All of my son's friends have smart phones and social media and use them in school. This detracts from the learning and community purposes of school, and puts immense pressure on kids who don't have smart phones and social media to get them (despite their parents wanting to choose the best time for their child to get access to these tools). I support a state-wide bell-to-bell ban on smart phones, and hope there will be a mechanism for schools to actually enforce the policy.

We have struggled with depression in our 13-14 year old, and observed addictive qualities of electronics and social media in our 11 and 7 year olds; as well as our friends' children. Banning

electronics has led to rebound of the kids emotionally within a day or two. Only to over time slowly give more and more leeway until the problem recurs. A big part of the problem is that they spend a large part of their day in school, and the norms there set a significant boundary condition on any effect our engagement at home can have.

Electronics, smartphones (dumb phones are fine), social media, really need to be minimized or eliminated while our kids are developing. Otherwise we risk losing a generation or two before society wakes up. These are highly destructive technologies for kids developing minds and I guess we have not caught up because it is all new. Kids need to be encouraged to communicate face to face and in person with friends and others in general.

Let me preface my statement by relaying that we have 4 teenaged children (13, 13, 15, 17) and our two oldest were provided phones at 14 because their jobs/sports require public transportation and the phones are for safety and coordination. None of our children have their own laptop, play video games or watch television, except on weekends as a family. We have worked and parented with purpose to give our kids as much of a tech-free childhood as possible.

Smart phones are addictive. If kids have them in school, they will find a way to use them, even if use is prohibited. I don't want my kids to have that distraction.

It is clear that social media companies are not willing to take action to protect young people from toxic content. State and local governments must step up.

Attending a phone-free school has made a huge difference for my 8th grader. She reports that she and others are learning more and are much less distracted, and it appears that her friendships are also improved.

It is not enough to tell children to not use; we know it's addictive. Even if one's own child does not bring his/her phone to school, or has the phone on "downtime" unable to be used, still other childrens' phones are distractions.

This is a collective action problem. Half the kids need their phones because the other half have their phones. This is a prime example where legislation can help!

I have been a volunteer in a Montgomery County high school for the past 10 years and have witnessed firsthand the increasingly detrimental impact cellphones are having on the students' ability to concentrate, participate and learn. It's sad and frustrating to observe. My heart goes out to the teachers whose job is being made unnecessarily more difficult and to the students themselves who are missing so many learning opportunities.

As a teacher, I see phones eroding the student's social skills and ability to focus in class. As a parent, I'm concerned about the amount of tech and screen time used mindlessly in the classroom without educational benefit.

At a very young age the obsession with technology has been an ongoing struggle with my kids. Their behavior changes and their moods towards other childhood activities become less exciting. My children complain of boredom without electronics. The days of walking to friends' houses seemed to be lost.

We decided during elementary school that technology was not necessary for our children to thrive. We limited use to less than 2 hours a day on weekends only. Weekday usage is nearly zero and the kids after years of enforcing don't question. They enjoy their friends and toys and nature to the fullest.

Children as young as kindergarten have been given Apple Watches which cause curiosity for children. I'm happy to see my children understand it's not necessary to be connected all the time. They know where to find me and how without using technology. I'd like to keep it this way.

I CARED FOR MY NEPHEW IN HS AND THE PHONE WAS A HUGE ISSUE SO TAKE THEM. NO COMPLAINTS FROM ME.

One of the lessons learned from K-12 is how to socialize with peers and adults face-to-face. Hiding behind technology won't serve them well as adults.

I helped my son's middle school, Eastern Middle School, become a phone free school last year. The principal got rolling carts with file folders and kids put their phones in the folders in their last period teacher's class at start of day. Cart was wheeled to closet next to main office in case of emergency evacuation of school, it would be wheeled outside. Kids went and got phones from last period teacher at end of day. It wasn't simple but was also doable and my son greatly benefited from being able to focus in class, talk to friends in hallways between class, engage with friends at lunch and play outside, and just have a break from the phone all day long. He no longer has this in high school and I see the ridiculous number of hours he logs on his phone each day.

My 4th grader is at the precipice of the negative effects of phone use and social media. Maryland must be a leader across the nation in protecting students and fostering a safe learning environment. The studies are clear and irrefutable, students do not need access to phones and social media throughout the day, and they do not need the influence of social media harming their developing brains at such a developmentally important time. You know the right thing to do, and we hope you can find the strength to do it.

I support this legislation yet, it is missing a component, which is Education. Teachers need to teach students WHY this legislation is important. Children lose so much of their life scrolling.

They lost time, reading books, playing outside, visiting friends, learning normal social queues, helping the community and more.

I have seen video footage of a student being knocked unconscious in my son's HS cafeteria, instead of students stepping in to help. This is a regular occurrence, and then it gets posted to social media platforms. This is not the behaviour I would expect in any society much less a school environment, a place of learning.

I am a public health professor at American University and teach courses on teen mental health. Social media/screen time is a major contributor to the current teen mental health crisis. I am happy to see my state moving in this direction to protect our youth.

My middle school kid does not have a phone. She has great focus and the ability to engage with children and adults of all ages. She is curious and analytic. She is also socially isolated because social life has moved to phones. She is there for putting pressure on me to give her a phone. I have to choose between social isolation and knowing that the technology will rot her brain and isolate her in a completely different way. If all the kids don't have phones and the messaging is that in-person interaction is more important, it would go a long way since school is life for children of school age.

As a parent and a longtime youth sports coach, I've seen the pernicious effects of addictive phone use and social media up close. I've seen engaged, gregarious and inquisitive kids flip like a switch upon getting their first phone, disappearing into the void almost immediately. Carpool trips to the ballpark that were once filled with conversation and laughter grew quiet, as kids spent the time in the back seat scrolling instead of chatting with one another.

Mobile phone use is a singular destroyer of attention, connection and social well-being. I am fully committed to getting these devices out of our kids' hands for as much time as possible, allowing them to fully develop as human beings and pursue their education with the attention and intent it deserves.

My daughter was addicted to social media and unable to put down her phone (without flipping out) during her entire adolescence.

Learning has improved since phones have been banned from class.

As a past parent of 2 and teacher, these devices have no place in the learning environment. Lock and Leave in for entire day.

BCC has required students to put phones in cubbies near the door of the classroom to have phones put away during instructional time. It has seemed to work very well. Not all teachers enforce it. But, getting more and more to do so would be helpful.

As a teacher I definitely see an improvement in attention among students with an away all day policy in middle school.

Two years ago, I observed a middle school classroom where the students were taking selfies and texting rather than engaging in learning.

I'm okay with dumb phones. Not smart phones.

As a parent and a mental health professional, I am confident in the necessity of this important legislation for our young people, particularly now, as tech giants have too few regulations to guide them.

Smartphones can be great tools, but they also are major distractions from learning. We all know that phones are terrible for attention. Parents who want to keep their kids away from phones face a huge collective action problem. We are undermined if phones are all over the school. Get them out and we at least stand a chance.

My neighbor who is a high school English teacher at MCPS says it's an amazing transformation in the classroom after the no phone rule...her students have longer and more quality attention span, they have better critical thinking and participation.

I am increasingly concerned about the distractions that phones create as well as the anxiety and other mental health concerns that not being connected while other friends are is generating with my teenage son. I don't think you can tackle phone use at an individual level, and creating a shared norm and climate is critical to supporting all learners. This is also for the benefit of the teachers--we have received several notes home from different teachers asking parents to help keep their kids off devices (and headphones) because of the challenges they create in the classroom.

The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt says it all -- we MUST take control of technology use in education so that children can learn academic and social skills without constant, harmful distractions.

The research and all our experience supports that this isn't helpful for our children. It is unsafe and unhealthy. While hard at the start, we will all learn.

As time moves on, there are more studies numbering the negative effects of electronics on children. They will intersect with technology regardless but we can help them by limiting their time during school hours

As a clinical social worker focused on child abuse prevention and response, I am strongly in favor of any policies and procedures that reduce internet and social media usage among children at school. Increased use of social media and unsupervised access to the internet increases unwanted exposure to sexual material and increases the potential for online

enticement. While social media and the internet are not going away, we must do everything we can to ensure age-appropriate access and mitigate the potential for abuse.

Phones away all day is the way to go. Let's not give more money to social media companies, whose sole purpose is to keep us (and our kids) glued to screens to make more money.

The phone is a distraction and her grades dropped.

Kids are so much better off playing in real life and playing outside than on screens!!!!

EMF radiation is strong whenever you touch a laptop and even stronger for cellphones not on airplane mode. Also, no one is supervising what students are doing (with their phones) on the school buses.

As a mental health professional with extensive training and experience in child development and mental health in kids and teens, I strongly support a bell-to-bell ban on phone use in schools as well as banning the use of social media for school or teacher communications with students.

I've also seen how children in school have access to their iPhones and social media accounts and using those platforms to communicate and share inappropriate information. Then as teachers we need to go and "parent" parents about their responsibilities and reprimand their child in school.

My son and daughter are addicted to their phones and have an average phone screen time of 6 hours per day despite all our attempts to limit screen time and to make them aware of the risks. Teachers have also told me that they struggle to ensure my son stays off his phone during their class and that they can't constantly fight with the kids to put their phones in the cubbies.

Especially in high schools students are allowed to take pictures of the material they are supposed to work on during class and always need phone while studying since they argument that material they need is in their phone, what is very distracting in all aspects.

All three of my high school age children report they PREFER when phones are put away. It is EASIER to learn all of them save. Students will WELCOME bell to bell phone bans. It is offensive and outrageous that this is even a question when the vast majority of teachers want a bell to bell ban. The teachers should be allowed to decide if and what type of ban will be in their school. No other opinion or preference is relevant.

I am a teacher and parent in MCPS. My son is not allowed to bring his phone to school however, it's only because I've been teaching in the county for 25 years and I have seen the downfall of education due to cell phone use. Students are like zombies. It's like playing

whack-a-mole in my classroom constantly telling them to put phones away. They always find a way to bring them back out. The only solution is no phone used in schools. Period.

My son's private school has banned all devices and learning has significantly improved.

As a parent that has lost a child to a social media online harm. The phones are a distraction and concerned with children academics, peer to peer communication, and teacher instructions is to name a few.

I have taught at the college level for the last 20 years. Many of the students I have now grew up with unlimited access to smart phones and social media. It has changed the way they behave in the classroom and interact with others. I work very hard to build community in my classroom but this has become significantly more difficult in the last five years. Students are not building the habits and skills needed to stay engaged in problem solving and stay present and focused, which is needed for them to do their best work! I want more for my daughter. I want her to build community with the people around her, to find her support network of real people, and to live a shared experience with the kids in her classes.

My son is often distracted by his phone which consumes his attention

As the aunt of 3 young children who will be soon entering school - and as someone who personally does not use a smart phone because of the observable negative impacts it had on my mental health and well-being - I firmly support the idea that phones should not be accessible to children during school hours, as they not only impact their focus, concentration, and ability to learn, but have long-term repercussions on their development and well-being.

Magruder cluster for 2021-current. Our children are grades 5th and 3rd respectively for the present 2025-26 school year. Just a few observations: Elementary-age (meaning as young as 3rd, 4th & 5th graders) MCPS students **are being given smartphones by a parent or caregiver.** My 10- and 8-year-old children will not receive a smartphone until as late as possible in their lives. Young people up to a certain age **do not need internet on a phone.** If MCPS commits to this "balcony view" approach, that will be starting on the right foot. Some students do need a phone, yes, for logistical planning and family connections. But that's it. Do you really need to text it so we can further damage your ability to interact socially, make eye contact, and speak to someone? What is it exactly that's on the internet that you NEED TO SEE SO BAD while walking around at the age of 9? Go on a computer if it's so important. When elementary and middle-school age students' are showing up with smartphones, how are any of us to know which ones have any parental controls installed? Last year a 5th grade-age girl student would get on my childrens' school bus and go on Instagram immediately. My children no longer ride the bus for many reasons such as this one. The buses have simply become unsafe. How is her having a smartphone on her school bus safe? How do I know what predators might be watching and interacting with that 5th grader on her Instagram account, waiting to groom her and extort her family? What accounts is she allowed to follow? Do her parents even monitor

what she is looking at? What if *my child* happens to be looking over her shoulder, and then sees a pornographic image appear on that girl's phone? What happens when a group of 6th grade-age boys all assemble around ONE kid's phone in the back of a bus where the driver has zero clue what they're looking at, and say that smartphone has full unfettered access to Google Chrome or Youtube? If nothing is to be done about that, why not just go ahead and install mobile casinos and pornographic movie sets on our childrens' school buses? The moment students exit an MCPS building, MCPS staff relinquish all their responsibility, but the danger **still continues on the school buses.** My opinion? You insist your kid has an internet-ready smartphone? Then they shouldn't be allowed to ride the bus. THIS IS ABOUT PROTECTING CHILDREN. But if a family insists that their child has a smartphone, then you can't use the bus. If phones are allowed on buses, then there needs to be some kind of authority instilled **on the buses,** whether it's via cameras, bus attendants, SOMETHING because those parents/caregivers are acting irresponsibly and are being inconsiderate of other families and students. If any age of students is using internet-connected devices without any supervising adult present, then the school buses represent a major shortfall/rift/oversight in a county schools SYSTEM'S full-scale protection of its student body. Don't count on *any* of the technology companies to care about this. Negligent parenting only exacerbates it all. It has to be the attentive, caring parents standing up for what's right.

I am a MCPS parent and a family physician seeing children in Montgomery County. I do think that cell phone use during school degrades the learning environment and increases mental health issues for children

I see every day the negative effect of technology on students in my high school English classes. Their attention span is so short, and their phones are just too attractive to ignore. PLEASE help us by instituting a bell to bell ban on cell phones for all grades.

Students should continue to be able to continue to have access to their cell phones during lunch for important communication with family.

Cyber bullying in 5th grade.

As a parent I know how hard it can be to singularly enforce rules when they are not consistent across the school or district. Allowing phones out in between classes, at lunch, or in certain classes. Only by being more strict with a "cold turkey" policy can it really be effective. Schools who have banned phones for the entire school day have observed increases in student engagement, in-person student interaction, in library books being checked out for reading, and students report they are happier.

The current MCPS phone policy is not sufficiently different from what was in place before: The burden of enforcing the policy is still on classroom teachers, who are already overburdened. That way the students do not understand that there is a uniform set of expectations about phones being away all day. It makes no sense to have the students take the phones out

during lunch or the 5-minute change-over period. Once the phones are out, students find it very difficult to put it away. I am a teacher and a parent. I see at home and at school that students' ability to communicate with each other and build community has declined massively, so have their writing and reading abilities, their ability to focus, and their mental health. All related to excessive phone use.

My son's high school has tested the pouches in the classroom to stow away phones. However, they are not enforced consistently. And at lunch, there is an overreliance on phones when the students could be socializing with one another.

My kids and I have been personally affected by social media. Despite outreach to the district child welfare agencies, lawyer "advocates", and county institutions, district court, etc. none of the individuals or organizations have done ANYTHING but to take payment for their services. For me this confronts everything I believed and was told about living in this county. My support for these advocacy efforts is personal. It's time to mobilize and take action against a deceptive system for our children.

Less screen time for my two MCPS high school students has always had an immediate impact on their energy, interpersonal engagement and being present to family, friends and community IRL.

I visited a classroom in my son's high school during an open house. It was AP government, and so these were kids who elected to be in a challenging class. Yet right as I walked in there was a table of three students watching TikTok videos on their phones with air pods in. They did that for the entire class while the teacher was teaching, barely engaging in the lesson. I know this is a widespread issue across all our schools!

At my child's high school, kids have access to phones in class even though they are not supposed to. The expectation that high school kids don't have phones in class is applied inconsistently. It's very disheartening. Teachers are either expected to manage the kids phone access on their own; it depends if they are interested or motivated or not. It doesn't make sense to leave this up to the high school teacher. If there were a system in which kids did not have access to their phone bell-to-bell it would make an enormous difference to their education and social lives at school.

My kids do not have phones. During lunch and free times, kids are always on their phones. And they often come home and say they were bored because of no social interaction. It's upsetting that we are trying to do the right thing but will now have to give in. Also, with all the studies out there, I'm not sure why MCPS has not instituted the policy where you store your phones in a safe/locker during the day. DC has done that.

Kids were in a school play assembly and were only looking at their phones :(

I am a mental health therapist and have many teen clients. I am appalled at the way phones and social media are negatively impacting their mental health and ability to connect with others. Schools should not be contributing to this problem.

As more data and research comes out about the harmful impact of social media and how phones enable this (especially for girls), parents can only do so much to limit use and access if strong school policies are not also in place. By having clear boundaries for all K-12 phone use, that helps families to follow through at home and also be consistent across friendship groups. To go alongside this policy, MCPS should also confirm how parents will be communicated with in emergency situations, because that is a primary justification for parents providing devices to reach our kids during school hours.

Our Middle School had fighting almost daily. Students were using cell phones to coordinate the physical attacks by texting the time and hallway in meet to meet. While some were delivering the beating, others were cheering it on while they whipped out their phones to record it only later to be posted to social media. Violence in our schools is like a sport to some. In March a cell phone policy was put in place and the violence has slowed tremendously. I would like to see all children in the state of Maryland benefit the same way from this bell to bell policy!

Read the book *Anxious Generation* - the data provided in that book was enough for me to feel strongly about a phone-free childhood!

My children are recent graduates. They didn't receive cell phones until they entered high school. In middle school, they complained that at lunch every student was on their phone rather than socializing making it very difficult for students to develop socially. Not to mention, students were horribly distracted by their phones in the classroom. In high school, it only got worse. Even though I had a child not interested in social media, they had to have accounts to keep up to date on school activities (honor society, theater, sports, clubs).

Recently a fifth grader showed my first grader something on YouTube while both children were waiting to go back inside after recess. This should have never been allowed to happen. If the older child did not have access to his phone during school, he would not have been able to show my first grade child disturbing content. Phones not only create distraction and more instances of viewing disturbing content but they rob kids of the vital skills of just communicating with each other. You know...like talking or having a conversation. Come on...let's get serious about this before an entire generation loses all ability to communicate effectively and have an attention span beyond 30 seconds.

Want to increase mindfulness and attention and less cyber bullying.

I speak as both as a high school classroom teacher of 17 years and a parent. I have used a phone pouch in my classroom to deter phone use but even with that, it is still such a battle. The students have much shorter attention spans and are eager to jump back on their devices. They are much less present than they used to be. Attention spans are lower and there seems to be less social interaction in general. This needs to change. Kids need to have an opportunity to learn and socialize in a phone free environment for the duration of the school day. We need legislation to back this up.

I am a parent of public school students and a teacher in a private school. My private school instituted a bell-to-bell phone ban in 2024-25. Students are more focused in class and more social during free time because of this ban. I hope all Maryland schools will consider this ban. Phones have no place in the school day.

I work in digital communications and am too aware of the complexities and dangers of kids having access to social media and smart phones.

My daughter is a 9th grader who comes home daily frustrated by classmates and teachers who are on their phones during the school day. Her classmates will prop up their phones against their laptops to hide them and then not listen to the lessons being taught and not be able to participate in group work. Students also spend time on their phones while walking laps during gym, preventing social interactions. The gym teachers at my daughter's school are also on their phones during class.

The research is very clear. Setting an appropriate standard (and reaping the benefits) is worth tolerating any pushback. Parents will continue to choose alternatives if this isn't addressed.

I personally decided to cancel my own social media accounts (i.e., Facebook and Instagram) during COVID due to the amount of misinformation being shared, and sought out more local, independent ways to learn and connect with communities I care about. I would hate to be a hypocrite and require my child to participate in something that I chose to opt out of myself.

I am a retired ESOL teacher. I have seen for myself how distracting phones are for students.

The highly addictive nature of smart phones and social media is very harmful for not only young kids but also tweens and teens. My older kids still get very depressed if they spend time on Instagram. I want to protect my younger kids who are still in middle school from the dangers of smart phones and social media.

I am a 25 year veteran teacher. Over my career, I have seen a dramatic decline in students' problem-solving and critical thinking skills. I attribute much of this decline in part to the pervasive distraction of smartphones: students' attention is constantly pulled away from the lesson by games, social media, streaming apps, or messaging. When phones are present, teachers are forced to compete — not with another student raising their hand, but with the siren call of entertainment apps, chat threads, and online content. In addition, we have an increase in fights at the school, as many as five in a day (all unrelated). School personnel can't get to the fights in time to break them up because of the swarm of students videotaping the fight. Without phones, there would be no fight videos, students wouldn't be able to contact each other throughout the day to "setup" their fights (locations, times, etc.) and there would be a decrease of trash talk on text during the day.

There is much research to support phone free schools.

As a former college professor (Associate Professor, Villanova University until our move to MD in 2013), I have seen the harmful effects of digital technology, especially phones and social media, on the intellectual, psychological, and social development of my students and their peers. Phones have radically undermined their capacity to pay attention, solve problems, remain aware of their surroundings, read substantial books, and engage in direct, natural conversation. And social media has distorted their sense of what genuine human relationships are, the scope of real friendship, and the proper mode of developing and sustaining authentic bonds across time. Both of these technologies are crippling our children's capacity to become mature adults, capable of taking on difficult responsibilities, like parenthood. The habits or virtues that our children need to develop in the context of their elementary and secondary schooling are being directly undermined by phone and social media use. Our children deserve better.

As a speech language pathologist, I am trained in assessing children based on their language skills, articulation, and pragmatics (social use of language). I have found teenagers to have a harder time using appropriate eye contact because they are so used to looking down at their phones instead of the person they are talking to, even in the absence of an underlying disorder such as autism.

As a parent of a kindergarten child, I want to protect my kid from growing up in a world where a play-based childhood has been replaced by a phone-based one. I don't want their early years shaped by constant comparison, endless scrolling, or the pressure of social media before they're emotionally ready for it. Research shows how early exposure to phones and social platforms can harm attention, sleep, self-esteem, and mental health—and I refuse to let that become my child's normal. But I also know how hard it will be when every other kid seems to have a phone in their pocket and access to social media long before they can handle it. Still, holding this boundary matters. Delaying phones and social media isn't about being strict—it's

about giving my child the chance to grow up with imagination, real friendships, confidence, and resilience before stepping into a digital world that can wait.

Texting and social media were a major distraction for my children. Keep them inaccessible during school!

My child's school had some instances of students using social media inappropriately which put other students in danger.

I am a new mom and worried about the environment that my child will grow up in. I'd like him to have a phone-free childhood, and I am worried about schools forcing kids to use technology unnecessarily, and that he'll be surrounded by kids that have smartphones way too early - we have so much research showing how bad this is for learning, literacy, and anxiety. Let's have our kids learn to write, read, and communicate and play!

I was a substitute teacher for the Spring of '25 and phones were a constant battle. I think they can be somewhat useful, but there's no reason they have to have them in each class. Things went much smoother any time the phones were taken away. I am sure that other schools with policies offer best practices, whether they are locked in classrooms or in the office, and parents can just reach out to the office. I know there is initially more work, but in the long run, teachers can do their jobs and students can focus on learning.

I'm personally invested in this. My son has given me reason to be vigilant in making sure he is safe both at school and within the walls of our home from predators online and made my spouse and I hyper-aware that no place online is free from those who would at any given moment exploit my son (who is too young to know better and too smart for his own good regarding technology). I am 100% for everything listed above.

I was a high school math teacher for 10 years. Phones can be a very helpful resource for students. Before students almost all had school devices, the benefits outweighed many on the cons of having phones. Now that almost all schools are one to one with devices, the cons definitely outweigh the pros. Students are so distracted most of the day and it is REALLY hard to have a school phone policy that works where students have access to their phones. That's asking all the teachers to implement it the same which will never happen and creates so many power struggles throughout the day which does not build good relationships. Now I'm a curriculum developer and when I observe at schools with a no phone policy the engagement, collaboration, and culture is wildly better. Face-to-face social skills are something that students need to learn and it's so easy to opt out of that when you have a phone. The no phone policy cannot be one that you ask every teacher to implement individually. It has to be a school wide action that takes that load off of the teachers.

I've been teaching for 24 years. Before our county wide cell phone ban which I was part of making happen, I wanted to quit. I was constantly repeating myself and taught to kids who would rather watch Instagram. Since the ban I've fallen in love with teaching again! The kids are

more talkative, they are engaged, they are talking to each other and I have a much higher pass rate and work completion. It's changed everything. I am also a parent of a middle and high schooler and no phones in schools is better for them. They only get 1 hr of screen time a day and they are really engaging kids in a way many kids are not.

As a college professor in Maryland, it is distressing to hear my students reflect on how much time they spend on personal devices/social media and how it inhibits their learning. Their short attention spans do not come close to the deep level of focus my preschooler brings to his play activities. Parents, educators, and policymakers should work together to make sure K-12 environments support and develop children's natural learning abilities, rather than interfere with them.

My daughters attend an all girls school that changed to fully phone-free this year. I saw how wonderful it was for them/their peers and hope my sons can have the same thing in MCPS

I am so thankful that my son attends a private school where they do not allow cellphones in school. Every child deserves this.

I think the use of pouches for phones would be ideal. They have their phone to and from school but not in school.

I've been a teacher for 18 years and seen the effects of phone addiction on our students. They are disengaged, overstimulated, and unable to socialize with peers. I have also seen and experienced the failure of current policies to protect students and teachers. It puts the burden of policing phones squarely on the teachers and creates impossible classroom management dynamics, as there are no consequences for students who refuse to comply with phone policies. The teachers can't do anything, security can't do anything, and many parents refuse to support teachers in their efforts. All of the research has been clear that phones do not belong in schools, and we are failing our students and teachers by not banning phones in schools.

I am a retired middle school teacher. Phones presented a constant distraction, opportunity for cheating on tests, and were used to instigate fights on and off campus. Students need to focus on their lessons and practice how to build positive relationships with one another.

I am the parent of a 12-year-old 7th grader in Talbot County Public Schools, and I strongly support legislation that places meaningful limits on student smartphone use in school and school-related settings.

Our district's use of Yondr pouches is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. The pouches are easily bypassed and do not address phone use before school, after school, or on the bus. During those times, nearly every student is on a device. My child has noticed—and

been discouraged by—the lack of conversation, connection, and awareness among peers. Children are physically together, but socially and emotionally elsewhere.

As a parent, I have been intentional about delaying a smartphone and limiting unsupervised internet access to support healthy development. Despite those efforts, my child has still been exposed to online content far earlier than intended simply by being surrounded by peers with unrestricted devices. This has left me feeling undermined in my role as a parent. I had hoped to guide conversations around identity, relationships, and values thoughtfully and at developmentally appropriate times. Instead, those moments are increasingly shaped by online content and social pressure beyond my control.

I believe technology can be a valuable learning tool when used intentionally and with clear limits. What is happening now is not intentional use; it is overexposure. Without stronger, enforceable statewide standards, families and schools are left without the structure children need to thrive.

I urge lawmakers to support strong legislation that limits smartphone use in school and school-related settings and strengthens protections around school-issued devices. Our children deserve learning environments that support healthy development, connection, and wellbeing. Thank you for your time and consideration.

In my daughter's middle school students are supposed to keep PMDs in their lockers all day, yet I have seen texts from friends on her at-home device with photos of kids at school, posing in the bathroom mirror. I especially don't think it's appropriate for kids to be taking selfies or any photos in the bathroom.

My son is in 8th grade, and I really appreciate the "away all day" policy his school has to try to keep him focused. This policy doesn't apply in high school currently, and as he already struggles to focus on school priorities over friends, I'm worried about the impact of the distraction come next year.

Teachers don't want phones in school. Parents don't want them. Even kids say they would prefer not to have them, but can't be the only one without. It's a collective action trap that requires a policy response.

I have seen phones distracting my nieces who are currently on night school. They are both highly committed to education but find it hard to disconnect from their devices during class. The negative impact is obvious

Excess use causes eye strain and may cause permanent damage.

I'm a HS library media specialist in HCPSS and I see the negative effects of social media every day. Not only are students distracted and not engaged in class, their mental health and the ability to interact socially has suffered. Now that usage of generative AI has exploded

amongst our students, issues with plagiarism and academic dishonesty is at an all time high. Studies are showing that AI usage is even more dangerous to our students' wellbeing and exceptionally damaging to critical thinking skills. Schools need to be phone and AI free.

I'm a teacher of 24 years. Smartphones ruined our kids. The failure to restrict their usage ruined learning and my job. I worked with our BOE, testified and organized and educated parents. We got Howard County to go bell to bell phone free. The kids are talking to each other, to me and I love my job again. Less anxiety and depression. Higher grades and deeper learning. It's so great. Please do the research, look closely at the mental health data. Talk to teachers. Longitudinally, we will look back at the SmartPhones allowed in class like I look back on the 1990s when kids were allowed to smoke at school. It's just unhealthy and we will live to regret it. Listen to the teachers.

Having administrators collect phones throughout the day is not sustainable; they have other work to do. Students use their phones in the hallways between classes and in the restrooms, sometimes contributing to situations that later involve school discipline steps.

The alarming increase and prevalence of mental health crisis, loneliness, and social dysfunction is abundant. This is a public health crisis. Maryland is one of the last states to take action to protect our children. It is time to correct this. Please support bell to bell legislation, with devices stored securely away and no more social media as a means to communicate. Let's look at the data around Ed Tech and consider paying teachers more, and unproven tech companies less.

At our middle school we made a concerted effort by all teachers to enforce our rule against cell phones during the school day. This includes earbuds and headphones since they are connected to the phones. We were buoyed by nearby areas like the state of Virginia which outlawed phones in school. It was only when we acted together that we were able to make a difference in reducing the use of phones in school. Single teachers acting alone would receive pushback from kids and angry reactions.

I am not going into depth about the impact of phones/social media on children as I think that is already well established. I also don't feel the need to expound upon discipline issues we have had with students negatively interacting with each other and accessing inappropriate content. Again, at this point, these issues seem too common in all schools to try to have to testify to these occurrences.

If you can't acknowledge this issue is DESTROYING today's youth, you need a very loud wake-up call. We shouldn't have to beg you to help protect our kids. I wish I could say that my kids would put their phones away on their own, but they are addicted and are teens, so they won't. They need the support of the system to prevent them from having their phones during the school day.

I am a parent and a teacher. When my son was in first grade and issued a school Chromebook, it became an enormous distraction. So much so that, instead of correctly taking the regular testing, he would click through random answers so he could play a game on his Chromebook. His first grade teacher had no idea of his reading or math abilities outside of the test data, which was inaccurate. Now, he's in 5th grade and often comes home reporting that his friends are using their cell phones during school and recess. It's another distraction and source of conflict in our house because we have no intention of getting him a phone anytime soon.

I'm a teacher in a private school that has banned phones for the past two years. The improvement in student focus and engagement is noticeable now that phones are not present. I'm extremely grateful that I'm no longer competing with the entire internet for my students' attention, and I'm delighted to see them engaging in real ways with their peers.

As a parent of three Maryland kids, this legislation is so important to me in terms of their safety, learning, growth, and socialization. These policies reflect the best available science, and are grounded in family values.

We need phones for emergencies but enforcement that they are turned off in school.

My middle schooler says he spends his lunch watching his friends play video games on their phones. He doesn't have a phone (because really, most kids do not have a real need for a phone) and is angry that his friends get to play games while he doesn't. There isn't much socializing going on because of the screens. I understand kids also sneak to use their phones in class, and request additional bathroom breaks to use their phones in there. These are completely unnecessary distractions that we can easily eliminate by restricting phone use during the entire school day. The phones need to be PHYSICALLY restricted, or kids will still use them - asking kids to just turn them off or leave them in their backpacks is not enough.

Last year when chromebook distribution was delayed, teachers encouraged students to use smartphone use by students. My daughter doesn't have a smart phone and was therefore bullied by classmates and couldn't take part in assignments. If schools are to rely on devices they need to have school issued appropriate technology and not rely on personal devices. Phones are a complete distraction. Even as adults we have a hard time putting them down. And kids /youth have even less self control.

My kindergartner is coming home telling me how much screen time is being used during instructional time, I don't want phones added on as more of a distraction.

I worked as a MoCo Substitute teacher from Feb. - May 2025 and it was very clear that the second students were left to work on assignments, they went to their phones and social media instead. Some students were actively posting content of themselves with live videos or reaching out to friends in other classrooms to try and get an excused bathroom break and meet up. It's already very difficult for a substitute teacher to hold the students to their

workload, and I am well aware that even without phones, students can't be forced to work on any given assignment. But currently, phone policies varied by schools and it was not always well known to me as a Sub. A consistent policy across the state would not only be helpful but possibly encourage the students to focus on their immediate classroom activities and classmates. It would also provide a firm policy for all faculty, staff, and substitute teachers to align behind. Thank you for your time.

As a parent of a Middle schooler and a child in Elementary school, there is no reason for children to have access to their devices. I am also in the classroom as an Instructional Assistant and there is no need for kids to have devices. If parents need to reach their child they can contact the office.

My children are in elementary school and I am scared of what's to come in middle and high school. I know the scientific and medical basis of why cell phones and social media are bad for developing minds and want to stop my kids from accessing it too early. But I am afraid that my parentally enforced prohibition of my kids using these things will socially isolate and exclude them and hurt my relationship with my kids. Kids do not need phones during school- our generation has proven this already. We did not need to talk to our parents or anyone else when we were in school. Developing minds actually need face to face interaction and socialization and the phones are interfering with that. Australia is proving this as well. And for the argument that they need them if an active shooter is in the school, recording videos or calling their parents will not help them, but further endanger them. The kids that are already using phones and social media are addicted to them and leaving it up to them to decide what's best is not responsible. Other addicts are not given that choice. If we want to keep our school's reputation for excellence and for producing students that are high achievers and mentally healthy, then we need to make this choice.

We moved from another state just over a year ago from a school that did not regulate phone use to one in MD that does. The increase in productivity in the classroom and retention of information by the students is incomparable! This legislation is long overdue and supported by a substantial body of research. Let's make the decision to support our teachers and support our students and pass these bills!

Community and government leadership on this issue is deeply appreciated. And essential. It is relevant to all aspects of health - mental, emotional, physical, social. It is a lonely and very difficult road trying to manage or regulate these issues alone - most especially for teenagers who seek and need connection with peers and want to be 'part of something bigger'. This approach supports us all. Deep thanks.

Social media should be banned to all kids younger than 18 years old. They do not need that distraction and certainly do not need cell phones in a classroom.

My school has a rule that phones cannot be "out" or used during class. One day during class a girl became very upset and stormed out of class and I learned that 3 boys were watching a video of her with someone else on their phone. It is horrible enough that videos of students are being shared, but to do so in the back of a classroom is disgraceful. Ban the phones from the classroom. Don't just rule that they not be visible.

As a mental health professional and parent I have seen the impact that social media and cell phone usage has done to developing minds. While technology is convenient and helps in so many ways, our children and their generation will suffer due to the impact it has on the developing mind.

Kids' development are being corrupted at an early age with too much screen time. This results in a loss of real-time face to face empathy. Ask current 18 to 20 year olds to make a phone call and they cringe. Why? Because they can handle the real time skills it takes to process face to face interactions.

My kids have experienced a completely unstructured environment in terms of cell phone usage and technology and I have seen first hand how it has adversely impacted learning, contributed to mental health issues and eating disorders, and undermined respect and engagement in the classroom. Most of my son's peers have screen addictions and their attention is severely impacted. For the health and safety of our kids please consider passing this legislation.

It is so clear at this point that this media is designed to cause addiction. We will look at this in 50 years, just like cigarettes.

When children are engaged on screens they are not interacting or questioning. They become robotic as it delivers excessive dopamine responses instead of small doses. France, Sweden, Finland, Australia and Netherlands have strictly enforced no phones and very limited screen time in classrooms. Which also includes smart boards and teachers just repeating text from laptops. They focus on critical thinking and engaging with their students and their peers to build social skills.

I am a mental health systems administrator who is witnessing firsthand the detrimental impact smartphones, social media, and other technology are having on the social, emotional, and cognitive capabilities of our youth. We must put evidence-based policies in place to maintain the high standards of education in Montgomery County and statewide. This is a no-brainer and a step in the right direction.

Testimonials in Support of Less Ed Tech & Chromebooks

Kids are still able to get on YouTube and other sites- they are a dangerous distraction & make it harder to concentrate on actual school. I wish less homework was on computer as well.

I know there are students who like to scroll for short videos and spend unreasonable amount of time on video games, which causes missing school assignments and make it hard to keep up with grades.

My daughter has no phone or access to internet/social media at home from us BUT she does through her school computer unfortunately so she watches Youtube, goes on Amazon and other social platforms without us knowing about it through her school computer. It is horrible. We take the computer away at night but wish that none of this was accessible in Middle School. There is NO need for her to have unlimited access to internet because of school computer.

As a teacher in DC public schools, I have seen first hand the accelerating harms of smartphones and social media and the transformative effects of the bell to bell device ban that went into effect in September of 2025. As a parent, I am horrified by the way in which MCPS has allowed screen time to take over our kids' lives and educations through the reliance on Chromebooks with (as every student and parent knows) completely inadequate lockdown technology; social media for communication about extracurriculars; toothless policies about phone use in class; and zero policies on phone use outside of class. I know addressing the Chromebook issue is beyond the scope of this current initiative, but I believe that its other provisions will make a big difference. One more point: this is a huge equity issue. I know how much time it takes to manage my kids' screen time, and I see that the overworked and resource-strapped parents of students at my high-poverty school do not have that kind of time to give. We are facing a new digital divide, with only the highest resource parents able to protect their children's developing brains from intentionally addictive technologies that are making fortunes for the elite (many of whom spend a little bit of that fortune sending their kids to screen-free private schools). Policies like the ones proposed by Distraction Free Schools Maryland are the least that our schools can do to lessen that gap.

We do not use tablets at home, do not think it's good for the attention span, but then wonder how frequently the kids are getting tablet breaks and TV breaks at school, especially for things like indoor recess because it rained the night before and is damp outside.

Post Covid our schools have not only relied but leaned extremely heavily on technology that was used during the pandemic, but then never retracted. While I am in favor of removing cell phones from in the classroom, I would especially like to see teachers and staff to stop assuming all kids have or need a cellphone and communicate with the kids through them. Assignments and class discussions require that a cellphone is needed or a student is often ostracized or shamed by staff. Two of my kids have been shamed for having phones that are just phones rather than smartphones, which I find completely unsupportive of a family trying to save money and save our kids from unnecessary screentime that is proven to be unhealthy for them.

I would also like to see Chromebooks removed as well or at least kept IN the classroom. The expense to families of damaged or broken laptops, because children are required to bring them home each day, is prohibitive. The strife, frustration and trust in my own household has suffered greatly due to the sneaking of time on the computers that is for non-homework related activities.

Trying to keep our kids' screen time limited and our home network safe is a daily struggle and basically futile. School computers insecurely store our network passwords, even when they are locked down with securely managed profiles. New chromebooks (loaners) that are brought home, unbeknownst to us, bypass the kid profile connecting instead to the default parent profile. It is a vicious cycle that puts great onus on the parents that is easily avoidable by the district.

We have watched our kids' interest in school diminish greatly since Covid due to the heavy reliance and mandated participation in the use of phones and Chromebooks in the classroom for instruction. Our kids are craving paper assignments, group discussions, library research and instructors that are actually reading and grading their work, rather than using AI. Our kids have expressed a disinterest because their teachers are so obviously disinterested. We have heard, "If they aren't even willing to read my paper themselves, why should I care about putting in the effort?" This is the total lack of connection we are creating as a culture and educational system and why we are completely failing our kids. LACK OF CONNECTION.

I went to my child's school for an observation day and was stunned at how many of the 6th graders were doing other activities in their chrome books while the teacher was trying to teach. My wife noticed the same behavior at the high school

The students are always 1 step ahead of any rules/regulation. They are using VPNs to circumvent firewall and Wifi restrictions. They are hacking chromebooks to play games. We must become more strict with rules in order to remove the options for them to play into the game developers tactics. Not the kids fault, but we need to support them by removing the options.

My experience as a support staff teacher in a county middle school provided me with more observations than I have time to share. Basically, I have seen the deterioration of learning occur, stressors unnecessarily added to students, degradation of social interactions between young people...adults not knowing all the places students can and will go to access what their peers are doing. Check to see if your child can and does access a private site set up by students, where you have to be given permission to join. Many, not all, will have subjects that can make students uncomfortable. I never accessed them myself, kids came to me to show me what they could access. Not all of it is fun.

My boys are at Woodlin and have been given the chrome books to use and school and take home. It is a huge distraction and they constantly battle to go on them to play games. I wish that they didn't have them, and the school didn't feel the need to use them as teaching tools. I'm fine with them learning the 'analog' way with paper and notebooks. Appreciate the teachers for all they do.

During the "reading rotation" section of my son's third grade class, at Chevy Chase Elementary, students are offered Chromebooks to use if they would prefer to "read online" rather than reading books to themselves. The online graphic novel books that most of them choose to watch are akin to watching movies. It doesn't take rocket science or expensive literacy studies to find out how to raise our students' plummeting literacy rates. Just take the chromebooks out

of the classroom, and have them read real books, and write responses with pencil and paper (rather than clicking on multiple choice tests on screens.)

Elementary school students at my son's school used Google Slides on MCPS Chromebooks to share YouTube links and other online content (like their own internet). Parents could not see any of this activity because we don't have MCPS email accounts but older MCPS students could join. Led to sharing among students of inappropriate content (sexual, racist) from the internet pasted on the slides, which younger children (eg K-3rd graders) saw because these 5th graders were opening them up while sitting on MCPS buses and using MCPS internet (it was required for students to take their Chromebook home; MCPS filters don't catch everything). Please note the Principal took appropriate action when this was reported. The point is that schools need to reduce students' access and use of tech (store Chromebooks at school!!), and make sure use of internet resources is restricted and monitored, and parents should have access to all online spaces that students have access to from the school. Since YouTube is super dangerous, schools should avoid sending kids onto YouTube, because from there they can go (almost) anywhere.

There are too many platforms for assignments, and I'm not confident they are actually effective. My 6th grader has cried several times while trying to do something on the computer, when it has nothing to do with her understanding of the work.

I have observed from own children (ages 8-10), when they get off their tablets after being in it for more than 1 hour, they are emotionally dysregulated. They may bounce off the walls, they may whine but when tablets are not provided the entire week, they're able to regulate themselves, not bounce off the walls and talk to each other and find things to play. Teaching in an elementary public school, I see how challenging it is for teachers to get their students' attention and engagement because many of the students are at home transfixed on their devices for numerous hours.

In addition to my elementary school aged children, I have a middle schooler. 2 years in and he only carries his lunchbox and a Chromebook to and from school. They do not use handheld books, rather a device the ENTIRE day! His eyes are frequently twitching because he is viewing the screen everyday, his thoughts are always jumping, he has multiple tabs open despite being told by us to close the tabs when in class and focus on teacher instruction. It's like the device is crack for his young developing mind and he can't just delete the tabs. It's so frustrating because our tax payers dollars are funding this habit! Something has to change!

My elementary aged child has been allowed to use school computers to access inappropriate content in the classroom that we would never let him watch at home. We have also observed that the overuse of tech in the classroom has been a major distraction and exacerbates his attention challenges. My child's academic motivation and performance is night-and-day depending on whether his teacher limits tech and enforces strict boundaries, but that is very difficult for individual teachers. We need to have better system-wide standards. EdTech is ruining a generation.

I read the following article in today's NY Times and the data presented are very concerning. We have two grandchildren at Wood Acres Elementary.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/16/opinion/laptop-classroom-test-scores.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

I am a grandparent of Maryland elementary school students, and note that even some graduate and law school professors are banning computers in their classroom and are requiring hand written note-taking and examinations, to avoid serious distraction and learning impairment. All the more so for grades K-12. Thank you for your consideration.

During kindergarten, my child shared how her teacher would show YouTube videos that animated and narrated books. It concerned me that her teacher was not reading books directly and that my child was associating reading with watching videos.

My 3rd and 5th graders told me they could access youtube during school. They were very ashamed to tell me they did. They said it was really hard to resist the temptation and everyone was doing it. Now every day when they get home we have a chat and discuss how well / if they were able to resist the temptation of playing a game or glancing at YouTube. I am FURIOUS that it is put on them to make that decision to resist screen distractions multiple times a day IN SCHOOL. We know how hard it is. They are good obedient kids but they shouldn't have to face this constant opportunity. It is exhausting. And also : how come the teacher or the teacher's aides don't have punishment in place?? I can't believe they don't notice what is going on.

My children report obvious cheating in all academic classes by kids with watches and phones, as well as inappropriate use of AI, and they express frustration with the prospect that a large swath of their peers are simply going to "cheat their way through high school, college, work... where does it end?" Digital devices are demonstrably inhibiting kids' ability to learn how to concentrate, read and think critically and deeply, have original thoughts. Yes we need to use the tools at our disposal, but I would argue tools like AI have no place in an educational environment where students have not yet fully developed critical thinking skills. One anecdotal example: for the annual history fair project - I have an older child who completed the project at a public school in a different state's largest urban school district. He was required to make an appointment at the city library, come up with questions about primary source material the librarian could then help him locate and use in his project. He had to think critically, interact with an actual person, review actual photographs and first-person accounts on a historical topic. In contrast, my 7th grader in MCPS was given a website with a few sources, mostly children's digital encyclopedias. She clearly does not understand how to formulate a thesis or research a topic. She has not been taught how to write a thoughtful prompt for the technology and "garbage in garbage out" these tools provided by the school are trash. She even told me "Don't buy me a real book, I can't use a real book because I can't cite that." It's nice that the kids save a few minutes with a tool that generates citations for them but really. They need to do some things by hand at least once to understand concepts.

School is also a place where kids learn social skills through their day to day interactions and the use of digital devices steals those moments away from kids. Over the course of 7 years of middle and high school, all those stolen moments of attention, interaction, contemplation add up and eventually we have a vaguely unhappy, incompetent and anti-social generation who cannot adapt as well to change.

Please, get the digital devices OUT of schools, teach the kids how to properly read, and let them socialize with each other face to face. Our future selves will thank you!

Tech in schools is distracting. Kids learn much better with textbooks, paper and pencil. I am very much in favor of phone free schools. They are a huge distraction and prevent kids from being kids! Also, I was shocked when the computer that my daughter brought home had unrestricted access to the internet. There needs to be much more oversight on tech in schools and I very much support implementing clear and strict limits on tech use.

My son was extremely excited to enter 3rd grade last year. However as the first few weeks and months passed his excitement and enthusiasm for learning disappeared and was replaced with apathy and moodiness. As I asked him about his classes it became apparent that he was spending much of his time in class on his chromebook. This is how he did many of his lessons. When I finally decided to check in with the teacher she claimed my son was spending most of his time playing video games or listening to music instead of doing his work. This was her explanation as to why he wasn't doing well or feeling challenged. I told her that I would talk to him about it, but I also mentioned that distractions such as video games are highly addictive, and that they are built to be stronger than us.

I asked my friends and neighbors, why did he even have access to these distractions on his chromebook? This seemed so obviously problematic to me and I wondered if I should contact the principal. But the response I got from every parent was 'just wait until he hits middle school, it is even worse then'.

We made it through third grade, and now in fourth grade, my son is thriving. The difference was obvious within the first week. He came home raving about his teachers, telling me everything he is learning, wanting to do extra projects with my help. He is happy and motivated again. This year, at the school open house, what I saw in his classroom was dramatically different. No students were using chromebooks. They were interacting with the teacher, engaged with each other and their work. When I had a parent teacher conference the teacher mentioned that every year, the kids have had a harder time paying attention and engaging. She is now using paper and pencil for most daily activities.

I am not saying that there is not a place for technology. We live in a technological world and that is not going to change. But the effects of digital distractions are profound. They negatively impact focus, productivity, mental health and social skills. And the research backs this up. There truly is no controversy. We must be so much more vigilant when it comes to what is

available on their chromebooks in the classroom. And no phones is, well, a no brainer. Schools that have implemented this policy have had extremely positive results.

And it should be common knowledge that these distractions are built to be stronger than our will power. I mentioned to a friend that it is like introducing kids to cocaine, then leaving it on their desk while they are in class, and then blaming them for doing drugs instead of applying themselves to their work.

I do think this is one of the great challenges of our time, and I hope that schools and policy makers will act aggressively to promote what is best for students, teachers and parents. Teams who help with technology in the schools must be made aware of what students can access on school sanctioned devices like chromebooks and work with school staff and students to prioritize a healthy learning environment. (Often there is a hack or workaround to find things like video games or tv shows or music, but by third grade my son had easily figured these out, so presumably experts should be able to do so as well).

Tech companies have one goal, profit. What is best for humans has nothing to do with it. We must create legislation and implement technology in schools with this understanding.

My children are completely distracted by devices including computers at school and social media has caused them emotional and educational damage. I fully support all of these remedies.

My high schooler talks about schoolmates watching sports and playing games for entire class periods. She says it makes everyone feel demoralized and unmotivated to try and engage. Teachers can't watch everyone all the time and don't need the extra job of phone police. I also have middle and elementary school children.

Screens make learning in school extremely difficult for my sons. They are a constant distraction and temptation. On top of that, they also limit socialization and in-person communication. They make cheating easy and tempting.

My daughter has expressed multiple times that during educational periods, there are students who have managed to circumvent the firewalls and site blockers and have accessed both adult porn but sadly child porn and have been playing it on their school provided device (11th grade). Additionally, art teachers have required her to obtain a social media account so that she could participate in an assignment only for that assignment to sit ungraded for weeks. Finally, teachers have not been following the BCPS required grading time frame and her submitted assignments will go completely ungraded until the end of the grading period which is not fair to her as she is a Tri-M student with a 504 Plan. This plan requires teachers to give her extra time to complete assignments but many times, the online system will lock and the teacher will not reopen the assignment for her, resulting in either a failing grade or a missed assignment that she cannot do anything about. It is time to bring back traditional grading systems and standards as it is clear

that the electronic devices are being used as a crutch and an excuse for poor classroom management.

Attending the open house at my middle schooler's public school, I saw widespread non-academic use of the school-issued laptops during class. At home, my own kids were wasting huge amounts of time on the internet on their school-issued Chromebooks when they were supposed to be doing homework. Now, I sit directly next to them at the same table when they are doing homework to make sure they stay on task. This is a waste of my time and contrary to my desire for them to become independent, but I have no other way to be sure they are staying on task. I'm sure other parents don't have the luxury of sitting there with their kids. It's outrageous that the school district puts these distractions into our kids' hands and there is nothing a parent can do about it. I think the distractions are being reflected in worse educational outcomes and test scores. I deeply regret that this natural experiment happened during my children's school years. I think they have been poorly served by MCPS's chromebook policy.

My child is in elementary school so we don't have issues with phones yet. The main issue I have is with the smartboards in classrooms and with the children using laptops to play games. The smartboards make it so easy for the teachers to play YouTube clips for the kids, which I have seen time and again as a classroom volunteer. These aren't premium ad-free paid YouTube accounts either, so the kids are sitting through ads. Other teachers just put on movies since the screen is so accessible. My daughter watched 10 different Disney movies throughout first grade, which doubled the amount of movies she had ever seen in her life up to that point. The "learning games" on laptops are nothing but a waste of time. Young children should be learning with tactile items and by working with their hands using pencil and paper.

I teach critical media studies at college, and when my daughter started kindergarten, I was shocked to realize how deeply the tech industry I teach my students to question has been embedded in public education — from daily use of Chromebooks at age 5 (which made school very difficult for my daughter) to ClassDojo playing on parental anxieties to sell paid memberships.

There are so many known detriments and harms to children with use of social media and gaming that keeping it off during school hours seems like the very least we can do to protect our children and set them up for success in years to come. I have an one year old and I'm already keenly interested and hope you can pass these common sense reforms.

My first grader struggled to connect with other students in his class because they spend so much time on these online programs that gamify "learning." The kids are incentivized to complete these lessons so they get free time on their devices. Meanwhile, their lunch and recess are super short. Luckily, the device is no longer sent home. With our older child, we were pressured to have him work on these sites even at home.

I noticed when kids do assignments using computers, they lose focus faster compared to paper based assignments, especially in math.

My kids are in elementary school. I am very well researched on this topic and therefore we are a very low tech family. I advocated for the cell phone policy in Howard County. I was recently personally impacted by the use of edtech in first grade, something that I had previously met with our principle about before this incident. The incident - My son, who plays zero interactive tech games at home, became obsessed with "boost" reading technology that is "made available" during "read to self" time. Rather than requiring all students spend time actually reading, he was given the option to get on a Chromebook to play "reading" games on "boost". For two straight weeks he woke up talking about his score and came home talking about how he advanced - nonstop. My son is 6 and is reading Harry Potter on his own. Not only was this technology not helping him learn to read but it was addictive and therefore harmful to him. The teacher agreed to stop him from using it resulting in an outburst at school. I will fight this fight every year with each new teacher. Interactive games have not been proven to help students learn but there is mounting research on the harms. I can only imagine the harm done to an already tech-addicted child being further flooded with dopamine. Pair this with the harms of no ad blocking, inappropriate internet access, and privacy concerns, and it is evident elementary schools do not need personal device use at all. Desktops in a tech class would suffice. I'm researching low tech private schools due to the incompetency of the public schools in dealing with this issue. I recently reached out to Howard County delegates about the AI task force that is underway. It's extremely concerning that there aren't any child development experts on the committee and I received zero responses.

I have a million stories of my children and their friends who are unable to escape the screens. There are countless lost opportunities for them to be creative, solve their own problems, etc. that are zapped when they turn to a screen to "solve boredom." This is an epidemic. Please help us keep kids off of screens.

Kids are using Canva to chat, can get on youtube

I see how creative my daughter is and how much she learns without a device, including chrome book learning. She's better able to self regulate as well.

I've been teaching elementary since 2011 and have witnessed the decline in students' focus and stamina. They can't sit still for more than 5 minutes and are always seeking stimulation. It's very challenging to keep students engaged.

While it is important to limit access to screens at schools, there needs to be a bigger push on cutting back on device use (often unsupervised) at home. Parents should supervise and be aware of what their child is engaging in on their personal devices. They should be monitoring sites children are using and limiting screen time. Through the constant overstimulation, children don't know how to be bored. They aren't learning how to creatively problem solve, or stay with a difficult skill through mastery. When everything is spoon fed and at their finger tips, we're robbing these kids of learning how to navigate the world without a screen in their face.

Schools should absolutely be sure that learning websites are in alignment with developmental goals. Districts should be blocking harmful websites on student devices. Kids are savvy and will often find a work around. It's imperative that districts keep up with this and figure out how to prevent students from accessing inappropriate content. Certain search topics should be blocked. There is so much to undo here. We can use technology to help kids learn but there need to be strict parameters.

This is likely the most important, impactful, and urgent change to current educational system that needs to happen right now. Our children are the most valuable resource for our country and our future and need to be maximally protected from the harm of social media and smartphones.

I've seen everything from accessing YouTube through docs, to using Chromebooks to look up non-age appropriate content that normal restrictions do not catch (the use of language that isn't flagged, and still accesses what should be restricted).

I often hear my son tell me that he's on his laptop a lot. Also, when he was in kindergarten he was able to navigate to YouTube through a school approved application. To me that is unacceptable

Pre K students do not need laptops to learn. This deeply concerns me.

I have witnessed the teachers using screens to "read" the story to the students instead of a using a book.

My 12 yo does not have a phone but she has a watch that we tightly control (who can contact her, no camera and no apps/internet)... however, thanks to school, she has her computer home every evening and uses it to access youtube all the time (via google sheets).. We take her computer in our room from 9PM onwards but I wish she didn't have access to any of this. Sadly it is beyond my control unless school can control better. (ok to share this but without my name)

My elementary school child informed me that kids were accessing the adult role-playing game "Bit-Life" from school devices during school hours, including experiencing "dating" someone through the game. The game has sexual content and this was disturbing.

Over-use of Chromebooks. Personal devices are available to students in primary grades.

I am also concerned about the lack of safeguards on school-issued devices. My child has been encouraged to use AI chat platforms and has been able to access adult social media spaces using her school iPad. The absence of clear limits has led to behaviors that are now common for many families: choosing screens over books, devices over outdoor play, and staying up late on a device after sneaking it into her bedroom. These are not discipline issues or parenting failures—they are predictable outcomes when children are given constant access to highly stimulating technology without adequate boundaries. From a child development perspective, this level of exposure places unrealistic expectations on young people to self-regulate in

environments that are not designed with their neurological, emotional, or social development in mind. Schools should be spaces that support focus, connection, and psychological safety—not places where children must constantly manage digital distraction.

I have seen how much it has helped that HCPS has stopped using phones during school. Unfortunately the chrome books are not safe and kids are frequently distracted playing games or doing anything other than learning.

My sons Teacher's are repeatedly telling me he is rushing through school work so he can play games on his school issued Chromebook. Screens are HIGHLY addictive and should be much more limited in schools especially before high school.

Too many children appear addicted to these devices. The minute they are taken away, many become hysterical and irrational. It's not healthy and I've wondered about some children who have had delayed speech with no clear reason. Children need to be protected at all costs. It's the adults responsibility to educate themselves, their children and act on the behalf of every child.

New research indicates that screens, and social media in particular, is harmful to children and adolescents' brain development in multiple ways. As the Washington Post reported, "high levels of screen use are linked to measurable declines in cognitive performance — slower processing speed, reduced attention and weaker memory. Rates of depression and anxiety climb steadily with heavier social media engagement. Sleep quality deteriorates as screens encroach later into the night, and researchers are finding troubling associations between screen habits and rising adolescent weight gain." Schools should be a place that improves our kids' cognitive abilities, not one that weakens them.

Unclear how using "Drift Boss" as a tool to 'learn' mathematics in 3rd grade classroom enriches learning.

Kids are using devices to watch other people live their lives vs. living their own lives. Siri is being asked to answer questions vs students doing their own thinking. We don't need smart phones in schools.

I know the research of significant learning decline since we introduced 1:1 devices to be used as part of instruction. I know the research of the harmful impact on attention having a phone, even when turned over and put to the side, has on attention. I know the research that explains the harmful impact of digital culture on reading behaviors.

Both of my children are in 6th grade. Earlier this year, both were failing every class due to computer use in the classroom. They were accessing games, watching YouTube videos, and completely ignoring their teachers. Once we had the school counselor take away the computers, their grades went to straight A's and B's. These devices and access to addictive content do not belong in our classrooms. Full stop.

I am a parent and a teacher. When my son was in first grade and issued a school Chromebook, it became an enormous distraction. So much so that, instead of correctly taking the regular testing, he would click through random answers so he could play a game on his Chromebook. His first grade teacher had no idea of his reading or math abilities outside of the test data, which was inaccurate. Now, he's in 5th grade and often comes home reporting that his friends are using their cell phones during school and recess. It's another distraction and source of conflict in our house because we have no intention of getting him a phone anytime soon.

The benefit of screens in classrooms is limited and questionable. The downsides are clear.

Of all the classes my son assists, only one it's mainly paper based and that's not enough. We parents made it through school without all these screens, so our experience shows that is doable.

I just received my 6th grader's quarter 2 IEP updates. It stood out to me that on just about every goal and objective, the school team noted my child's pull to digital distraction on his school issued Chromebook as a barrier to progress. He does use assistive technology so needs the device for some of his class work but this feedback made me wonder about his access to non-school related apps and content that are getting in the way of his education.

I would prefer they don't use chrome books or if they must in very limited and monitored ways. My kid has more unsupervised computer time at school than he does at home and there isn't anything I can do about it.

Gaming websites should be inaccessible during the school hours.

My kindergartner is coming home telling me how much screen time is being used during instructional time, I don't want phones added on as more of a distraction.

My child in second grade googled URANUS in class and got a disturbing picture that was not the planet. One teacher cannot oversee a class of kids 'searching up' the internet. Especially young kids who can't spell or type.

As a retired teacher's aide from MD School for the Deaf, I totally agree with all that this is implying. Children at a young age and children of all ages under 18, should not have access to technology during the school day, except when they are taking a class that uses such technology. The school's IT dept must have the capability to screen access on children's devices at all times so undesirable content does not appear on their screens. This used to happen to our preK kids during "nap time" or "quiet time" where I would find them scrolling on sites not made for children, which resulted in their iPads being taken away. When my children were growing up, cell phones were just getting popular. I refused to get my kids phones until they were driving and they were to leave them in their cars during school. I can see how children get distracted and grades plummet if given the opportunity to scroll or use devices

during school hours. Teachers need to be more vigilant and walk around the classroom to be sure students are doing their assignments and not getting distracted by online content like social media, YouTube, etc.

I want my daughter to be able to work with her school and homework with less screen time. I switched to a Montessori public charter school in order to decrease screen time for my child's education; what I found is that while relatively less, the schools are still married to an array of EdTech gamified apps. Computerized testing and Tech Ed are fine, but EdTech has zero evidence of improving performance and actually negatively affects focus, concentration, and retention.

An older student had access to his phone during recess and showed my younger son things on YouTube that I was not comfortable with. This was entirely unsupervised.

My child has a gamified math program for homework. As a kid with ADHD, this is particularly challenging, and he does not learn as well as he would if there was a paper option. However, neither we, nor the teacher, have any choice regarding the county's reliance on screens to teach these important concepts. He gets plenty of gold coins in the game, but does poorly on exams. I find the over-use of technology in MCPS unhelpful at best.

Happy to share that my ninth grand grade son that has just transitioned to Catonsville high school can barely print. Perhaps because he's been on a device since Covid? And even with tutors and a 504 and lots of parental supervision, he is still struggling immensely in ninth grade.

Chromebook settings and security are not in place at MCPS. My first grader has been able to google inappropriate content for his age. The teacher did not know how to block it and needed to reach out to others. Better IT oversight and transparency needed. Children should not be able to do things on their school issue device AT school that is prohibited at home and not age appropriate.

The level of technology usage in my child's school is a major concern. While I believe technology should be appropriately implemented, I have observed its use as a teaching crutch and a harmful distraction with too few guardrails. In particular, the Chromebooks given to every student are lacking appropriate safety controls and the teachers are largely unaware of 1) what the devices are capable of and 2) how the students are currently using them. Transparency in what my child has access to and accountability for the teachers and administrators are absolutely critical and are not currently being demonstrated.

When a YouTube video sang happy birthday to my Kindergartener instead of her friends.

Top much use of TV during indoor recess.

On the day that Charlie Kirk was shot and killed, I was ready to discuss it with my daughter when she arrived home and explain that the video was extremely graphic and that if someone tried to show it to her she should not watch it. Unfortunately I never got to have that conversation and warn her. A child at school showed her the video, which is disturbing on so many levels. Some things cannot be unseen and this is one of them.

I can't believe 3rd graders are forced to stare at a laptop. They need books and hand writing to build deeper learning. There is no point taking the phone away (leaving them with no contact in an emergency) and then forcing everything else into the computer and apps. And no point handing out computers before typing skills or computer skills outside of touching a screen.

Viewing cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath's argument at the Senate hearing on how tech is shaping America's youth (on Jan 16 2026) was extremely compelling. He argues that excessive classroom screen time hinders deep learning, attention, and memory, as humans are biologically designed to learn from other people, not devices. He notes Gen Z is the first generation underperforming their parents academically and cognitively, linking this to technology replacing traditional, hands-on learning.

Videos are replacing teaching. Kids spend more idle time on screens at school than at home. Kids are playing games and watching shows during school on chrome books. Please preserve our children's teacher-to-student learning and brain development.

My fourth-grade child was "caught" using his Chromebook to access content regarding military things online. The Chromebook was "ripped" away from him and he was "punished" by losing access to the Chromebook for two weeks at school, unless for learning purposes. The administration said the burden of fault was 100% on him, and he should have known better. The repercussions for my son were huge; his symptoms from neurodivergency spiked from the guilt and shame he felt for being punished for his ADHD impulsivity and curiosity, driving him to explore his interests while being extremely bored at school. As a parent, I was shocked that he was pointed to holding exclusive responsibility in the incident and that the teacher, administrator, and software that failed were not pointed to as holding any culpability or responsibility. Rather than being apologized to for exposing our child to mature content, we were chastised that he could not control himself. I asked for information on the amount of time my child was spending on a Chromebook, why Chromebooks were used during non-instructional time, and how much time the teachers were told to spend on Chromebooks. I have more detail on this incident, but will limit it to this summary.

The principal at my child's school, upon my request, shared the presentation slides that she gave to the teachers about expected screen time use and the well-researched reasons that Chromebook use should be limited. The PowerPoint actually said "Chromebooks should not be used to babysit the children". I had no idea teachers thought they were babysitters; I thought they were educators. Despite obvious awareness of the research that points to the benefits of analog learning, our school administrator has implemented zero accountability measures or

clear guidelines for use for teachers, which means that teachers have no carrots or sticks for limiting screen use.

My son says that he spends at least 50% of his day on his Chromebook. He is in fourth grade. When I participate in the classroom, I see children who cannot follow simple instructions; the children cannot fold papers, such as to make a wish catcher, and we have not had a single group project this year.

The number of ways that Chromebooks disrupt child development cannot be understated. Developing executive functions is especially vulnerable when most activities take place online. For example, in our school, the homework is shared via a Google Slides that my child does not have access to unless I open it up. I cannot print it out because the teacher changes it throughout the week. My child has to ask me if he has homework, even though he wants to be independent.

My child is confused, frustrated, bored, and sleep-deprived. Please, remove Chromebooks from our classrooms and save our children.

My child can't complete her homework because she has to do it in a school-issued Chromebook that has ready access to music videos, video games, and myriad other distractions at her fingertips. County IT admin seems to be unwilling to block websites or doesn't care. Please, don't set my child up for failure. Allow students/parents to opt out of Chromebook use for homework.

Bothered by how much screen use there is in kindergarten.

Decrease in attention span, increase in mental health issues with high levels of tech use.

Teachers cannot monitor all of the digital content students watch on their Chromebooks at school, nor should that be part of their job, in my opinion. But not monitoring leads to students seeing inappropriate content, inevitably, in our experience. For example, my son was watching history videos on the BrainPop app as a 3rd grader at school. He later told us he watched a couple of disturbing videos about the Holocaust via this app. Students should first be introduced to such topics in much later grades (Middle School in this case), and with a teacher teaching and facilitating discussion, rather than the students individually watching via 5 minute videos on a loosely monitored app.

***** Updated 3/2/26 10:30 AM *****

Maryland Report Card.pdf

Uploaded by: Betsy Tao

Position: FAV

F

Maryland

OVERALL SCORE:

50

CURRENT LAW: N/A



STRENGTHS:

Maryland legislators who introduced bills to advance student outcomes should be commended.

OPPORTUNITIES:

Maryland legislators should review emerging research on the many benefits of phone-free schools and must prioritize reintroducing a bell-to-bell bill, stipulating inaccessible storage.

CRITERIA	PTS	STATE PROVISION
Covered Time Period & Storage Requirements	50	-----
Devices Included	--	-----
Necessary Legal & Medical Exceptions	--	-----
Prioritizes Safety & Education Standards	--	-----
Enforcement Provision	--	-----
Data Collection	--	-----

OVERALL SCORE:

50

A	B	C	D	F	0	Incomplete
Bell-to-Bell, Inaccessible Storage	Bell-to-Bell, Accessible Storage	Class Instructional Time Only	Policy Required, No Mandated Elements	Bill Failed	No Bill Introduced	Bill Pending
90 – 99 PTS	80 – 89 PTS	70 – 79 PTS	60 – 69 PTS	50 PTS	0 PTS	---

Phone-Free Schools State Report Card

Methodology Overview

The **Phone-Free Schools Report Card** assesses the strength of statewide policies regarding student access to personal electronic devices in schools. Grades are based on how closely the law or executive order aligns with the [2025 Phone-Free Schools Model Bill](#).

Policies with **bell-to-bell restrictions** and **inaccessible storage** were awarded the most points, as these provisions can have the greatest impact on student outcomes and teacher satisfaction. Additional Model Bill provisions further support the likelihood of success.

States with failed 2025 bills received a flat score of 50 points (F). States where no bill or executive order was introduced received a "0." States with a two-year (biennium) legislative session where bills were introduced in 2025, but were still pending as of publication, received an "Incomplete." Pending ("Incomplete") and failed bills were not reviewed against the Model Bill.

Grade Key

A	(90 – 99) Bell-to-Bell, Inaccessible Storage
B	(80 – 89) Bell-to-Bell, Accessible Storage
C	(70 – 79) Class Instructional Time Only
D	(60 – 69) Policy Required, No Mandated Elements
F	(50) Bill Failed
0	(0) No Bill Introduced
	(Incomplete) Bill Pending

Criteria Descriptions

Covered Time Period & Storage Requirements (base grade)

Bell-to-bell with inaccessible storage	90 PTS
Bell-to-bell with accessible storage	80 PTS
Class instructional time only	70 PTS
Policy required, no mandated elements	60 PTS

Devices Included

Bell-to-bell with inaccessible storage	2 PTS
Includes some personal electronic devices	1 PTS
Includes only smartphones or does not define scope	0 PTS

Necessary Legal & Medical Exceptions

Includes exceptions for IEP, 504, and medical needs	2 PTS
Includes exceptions for either IEP, 504, or medical needs	1 PTS
Does not include any necessary legal and medical exceptions	0 PTS

Prioritizes Safety & Education Standards

Does not weaken safety or education standards	4 PTS
Weakens either safety or education standards	2 PTS
Weakens both safety and education standards	0 PTS

Enforcement Provision

Includes student enforcement provision	0.5 PTS
Does not include student enforcement provision	0 PTS

Data Collection

Includes annual data collection	0.5 PTS
Does not include annual data collection	0 PTS



Visit PhoneFreeSchoolsReport.org for more information.

NASRO Mo Canady Phone Free Signed Statement.pdf

Uploaded by: Betsy Tao

Position: FAV



The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) is dedicated to making schools and children safer by providing the highest quality training to school-based law enforcement officers.

NASRO, the gold standard in school-based law enforcement training, is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1991 for school-based police, school administrators, and school security and/or safety professionals who work as partners to protect schools and their students, faculty, and staff members.

I have been the Executive Director of NASRO for the last 14 years and prior to that I was a School Resource Officer for 14 years.

NASRO is extremely supportive of a statewide bell to bell phone and social media free policy for grades k-12. We do not support an exception for emergencies. We know that schools, students and staff are safer when student cell phones and personal devices are not present during the school day. For this reason, **if students are allowed to bring personal devices to school they should be securely locked away and inaccessible to the student from the first bell to the last bell of the school day.**

We often hear parents say they want to be able to contact their student in an emergency situation such as an active shooter in the school. However, outside communication during this critical time makes students less safe.

In an emergency situation that requires a lock down the following are essential safety procedures:

- 1) Students need to be focused on the adults giving instructions. During this critical time, students need to listen to the teacher and/or first responders for guidance. Messaging or **calling their parents who are not in the building could distract students from life saving instructions.**
- 2) If in hiding, **students need to remain quiet.** Noise and/or light from students' phone could alert an assailant to the location where students are hiding.
- 3) **Phone lines need to remain open** for communication between staff and first responders. If hundreds of students are calling their parents then the communication channels may be overwhelmed and impede necessary communication with first responders.

4) Clear access to the school allows for faster response times by first responders. **If parents are alerted by students and rush to the school, the extra traffic could potentially block access routes for emergency response vehicles.**

5) **The fewer people approaching the building, the more secure the surroundings.** Parents rushing to the school can risk being mistaken as an assailant.

6) Schools are equipped to manage emergency communication with first responders and with parents. **Misinformation can quickly spread over social media.** If students are texting and posting on social media during an emergency situation it could lead to a more hazardous situation.

For the best outcome it is essential for students NOT to be on their phones during a lockdown. **In addition to phones placing students in more danger during emergency situations, they also contribute to a less safe school environment in general.** A significant portion of discipline referrals result from students having access to phones and social media during the school day. These concerns include privacy violations, social media drama, cyberbullying, and fights. All of which are significantly reduced in schools that require students to lock up their phones for the entire school day. If students have access at any point during the day, lunch or passing periods for example, then these infractions still occur. Therefore, it is prudent that legislation be passed so all students can have a safe and distraction-free learning environment.



Mo Canady

Executive Director
National Association of School Resource Officers

Written Testimony for SB928 (B. Tao).pdf

Uploaded by: Betsy Tao

Position: FAV

SB0928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable) before Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

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

My name is Betsy Tao. I am a parent with two kids in MCPS schools. I serve as the chair of the technology committee for our county council of PTAs. I also lead Distraction Free Schools Maryland, which is a coalition of over 1000 parents in Maryland who support phone free schools.¹ I am honored to be here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 928, the Phone Free Schools Act, as amended to match the latest version of its companion bill, House Bill 525.

What I'd like the committee to understand is this: Of all the education bills crossing your desks this session, this one is the most important. We can't successfully invest in our children's future without directly addressing why our schools are no longer environments conducive to learning. Every single student in Maryland is negatively affected by the distraction of technology in classrooms, starting with personal mobile devices. If we don't make meaningful steps to remove those distractions, starting with personal mobile devices, this Committee's work on educational investments and interventions simply will not have the intended effect.

Senate Bill 928 moves us boldly and courageously in the right direction by mandating that personal devices, especially smartphones, be inaccessible during the entire school day, bell to bell, for all students kindergarten through 12th grade. Let me paint a picture for you of a middle schooler in Montgomery County, which currently has a full day phone ban without an inaccessible storage mandate like the one in this bill. This student's smartphone sits in her pocket, buzzing with notifications from group chats and apps. Next to her are classmates playing games and watching videos on their Chromebooks, which they carry around with them all day instead of books. Her teacher is standing in front of a giant screen, with distracting animated images added on slides to catch students' attention. Does this sound like a healthy learning environment to you? Is it any wonder that our students are struggling on core

¹ Distraction Free Schools Maryland, [Community Letter of Support Testimonials](#) (continuously updated).

subjects, are less cognitively capable than prior generations, and show up at colleges unable to read, do basic math, or manage their time effectively enough to even meet deadlines?²

Some people believe that kids need to learn how to manage their use of devices as technology is a feature of modern life. This statement sounds reasonable on its face, but it is a pernicious myth and needs to be called out as such whenever it is uttered. How many adults do you know struggle to manage their device use? Surveys show that half of all adults admit to being addicted to their devices. Teenagers spend 6-8 hours a day on average on devices watching videos and scrolling through social media.³ There is no such thing as digital balance because it was never a level playing field - tech companies have spent billions of dollars to maximize our engagement on their platforms, stealing as much of our time as possible. Our kids never stood a chance.

We need to give kids seven hours a day, 180 days a year, when they can be free to regain some of the skills that technology has stolen from them: the ability to be still, to think deeply and critically and with intention, to read and reflect on what they've read, to engage face to face with their teachers and peers, to be in tune with their own thoughts, to discover who they are.

Bell to bell bans are becoming the norm across the country,⁴ and Maryland can be a national leader by passing this bill. This bill is aligned with the science of learning, aligned with what the majority of parents and educators want,⁵ and provides a consistent policy for all Maryland's school districts benefitting every single student in the state. Therefore, I urge this committee to support this bill. Thank you.

Enclosures

- Phone Free Schools Report Card - Maryland
- Distraction Free Schools Community of Support Testimonials (to date)
- National Association of School Resource Officers, Canady Letter

² See, e.g., Adam Pagnucco, Montgomery Perspective, [MCPS's Shocking Performance on College and Career Readiness](#) (Apr. 4, 2024).

³ American Academy of Pediatrics, [Average Amount of Screen Time for Children and Young Adults](#) (Jan. 21, 2026).

⁴ [First-of-Its-Kind National Educator Survey Reveals Both Promise and Peril in School Cell Phone Policies](#)

⁵ Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools, [State Board Resolution on Cell Phone Use in Schools](#) (Aug. 26, 2025).

MD - Bzu Testimony - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Bzu Shiferaw

Position: FAV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you,

Bzu Shiferaw

Campaign Manager, Fairplay

SB928_Tenenbaum Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Cara Tenenbaum

Position: FAV

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device
Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)
Submitted By: Cara Tenenbaum

Dear Members of the Education Energy and Environment Committee,

I am a parent of two children in Montgomery County schools, and have been concerned about the harm that electronic devices do to our children's developing brains. There is more than ample scientific research on the topic - on the decrease in children's attention spans, increase in depression and anxiety and increase in obesity. More germane to this discussion, however, is the decreased academic performance of students who have access to cell phones during the school day.

Also, of great importance is the need to ensure communication between students and their guardians during emergency events, like the one at Whitman HS recently. Threading this needle is difficult, and the safety of our students must be paramount.

In addition to banning personal communication devices, such as smartphones, schools (as well as parents and the state, generally) must also ban social media for teens.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention the over-reliance on devices that my children face in school. The teachers and students are required to use "ed-tech" like iXL which gamifies learning. While studies show that gamification can be useful, it is not helpful for complex problems, like mathematics, that are better solved on paper. I have numerous additional thoughts on this topic and will be reaching out to my county school board.

At this point, there is no data to oppose banning smartphones in schools.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony and your support of this bill.

Sincerely,
Cara Tenenbaum
Kensington, MD

SB928 Testimony - Haidt and Rausch.pdf

Uploaded by: Casey Mock

Position: FAV

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

We are writing in support of SB928, which would establish phone-free schools in Maryland. We applaud your efforts to protect children and believe that a first bell to last bell K-12 policy is imperative.

We are the authors and primary researchers of the book *The Anxious Generation*, which documents the negative effects that smartphones and heavy social media use have had on youth around the globe. The book has spent more than 35 weeks at the top of bestseller lists and has been used to motivate grassroots mobilization of students, teachers, administrators, and parents for phone-free schools. Technology can certainly provide benefits to young people, but the current business incentives and practices of some tech companies are causing vast harm to children and adolescents. Protecting kids from online harm is non-partisan and supported by the majority of Americans. Legislators have the opportunity to take clear, decisive action, joining the bipartisan movement to protect kids' mental health, attention, and relationships by supporting phone-free schools.

The proposed legislation would be an important step toward giving K-12 students a break from harmful and addictive technology during the 6-7 hours each weekday they are at school. This is critically important for students, as well as for teachers and administrators. Schools influence 13 years of critical child development and can help students establish lifelong patterns of healthy behavior. Based on our research, we believe that phone-free policies are likely to provide substantial academic, socio-emotional, safety, and economic benefits for schools.

Phone-free schools are likely to reduce distraction and increase student focus. Recent studies have found that students receive an average of [237 notifications](#) each day. Just during the school day, [students spend an average of 90 minutes on their phones](#), with 25% spending more than 2 hours. [Experimental studies](#) have found that students' device use reduces subsequent academic performance. [35 percent of students](#) admit to using their phones to cheat. [Many instances](#) of bullying and fighting begin with electronic communications.

Teachers, who are best qualified to comment on the effects of phones in schools, recognize the problem. [84%](#) of educators believe that social media contributes to mental health issues among students at their schools. [91%](#) said social media has negatively affected how students treat people in real life.

The problems have reached a tipping point. Teacher morale is plummeting, and [some teachers](#) have been driven to quit. [88% of teachers](#) believe that smartphones make their students more distracted or tired, while 74% believe they make students more depressed, anxious, or lonely, and 85% believe they increase student conflict and bullying. [72% of high school teachers](#) say that cell phone distraction in their classes is a major problem. [83% of teachers](#) support a policy that prohibits phone use for the entire school day.

We are aware that Maryland is also considering a K-8 bill, and we want to assure you that the evidence is clear that students in grades 9-12 need a break from phones and other personal electronic devices just as much as their younger peers. We recommend that any policy include these five essential features, as outlined in [this model bill](#):

1. **Require all K-12 schools in the state to comply.** This eliminates confusion across districts, establishes a norm for the entire community, and allows students to relax, knowing they will not miss activities with friends at other schools. It also establishes a strong policy now, while the issue is receiving legislative attention.
2. **Physically separate students from all personal devices.** The regular use of devices in school distracts students, whether the device is a smartphone or is used only to receive text messages. We would encourage the bill to clarify that it fully separates students from all devices.
3. **Ban phones for the entire school day.** A class-time-only rule also doesn't provide teachers with as much benefit as they might expect. Research from the National Education Association [found that](#) 73% of teachers in schools that allow phone use *between* classes report that phones are disruptive *during* class. In contrast, of the several policies examined, only the phone-free or "away for the day" policy produced good results, with only 28% of teachers in such schools saying that phones were disruptive during their classes. It is only when students have 6-7 hours away from their phones that they fully turn to each other and to their teachers.
4. **Stop schools from requiring smartphones and social media use.** Schools should not use social media as a primary communication tool, allowing parents the freedom to make individual choices about whether to use it, both for themselves and their kids.
5. **Include two (and only two) important exceptions.** While it may be tempting to add many exceptions to placate parent fears and local control advocates, we have found only two to be widely necessary: medical and special education needs. Some students may have a legitimate health or educational need that requires access to their own smartphone. A common exception is allowing students to use their phones in emergencies. While it makes emotional sense for parents to want to talk to their kids during an emergency, [experts](#) suggest that kids should focus on the teacher's instructions rather than calling their parents.

To date, close to 20 states have enacted K-12 bell-to-bell legislation. A few states, such as Georgia, first enacted a K-8 policy but have pending legislation to extend it to 12th grade.

We have yet to find a school that has earnestly tried to go phone-free and then regretted it. Students, teachers, and administrators [report a wide range of](#) positive benefits, from in-person socialization and laughter in the hallways to reduced distractions and improved student engagement.

We thank you for your efforts to protect children in Maryland and would be glad to follow up.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Haidt
Zach Rausch

_SB 928 (Sen. Harris) Favorable McComas Testimony

Uploaded by: Christine McComas

Position: FAV

Christine McComas Testimony SB 928 Hearing, March 4, 2026
Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act

SB 928 (Sen. Harris) - Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members, thank you for hearing me today.

My name is Christine McComas and I am the mother of Grace McComas for whom **Maryland's Grace's Law (2013 & Grace's Law 2.0, 2019)** against cyberbullying is named. We lost our joyful and kind-hearted Grace to suicide on Easter Sunday of 2012 at the dawn of smartphones and social media availability. Indeed, for many it's difficult to imagine or even recall a time before the instant communication and relentless noise that digital technologies have brought into our lives.

The death-wishing, hateful cyber abuse aimed at our young teen was shocking in and of itself, but at the time no one understood the invasive and pervasive nature of cyberbullying, that allowed instantaneous and far reaching amplification of damaging abuse, making it inescapable. The research now shows that cyberbullying is an independent risk factor for depression and suicidality and the trajectory of smartphone adoption tracks with the alarming decline in child mental health and lowered cognitive ability.

(I *highly* recommend watching the short intro statements of the panel experts that spoke at this U.S. Senate hearing I attended in January entitled "[Plugged Out: Examining the Impact of Technology on America's Youth](#)", which starts at 32:32.)

We are now in the midst of a serious public health crisis and for the safety and wellbeing of our children, these electronic devices should not be accessible during the school day.

Since Grace's death I have advocated for social media reform at the state (**MD Kids Code, 2024**) and federal level (**Kids Online Safety Act**, pending), [advocating with other bereaved parents](#) who have lost children to varied harms, but all connected to social media and personal communication devices.

Not unlike Big Tobacco, we now know that Big Tech intentionally uses manipulative, addictive design to encourage compulsive use in order to collect data (upper tens of millions of data points on a child by age 13), which is then sold for \$BILLIONS in ad revenue aimed at our children, even as *they know* they are harming and sometimes killing them. We advocate on Capitol Hill with corporate whistleblowers and I was in Los Angeles last week and [stood vigil as the first landmark social media trials have begun](#).

Over the years families have reached out for help through [Grace McComas Memorial](#).

These are REAL, Maryland families in crisis, and smartphones were used, including during school hours, to harass and harm- sometimes criminally.

~ A Maryland woman testified in 2018 for Grace's Law 2.0 in honor and memory of her teen nephew, who died by suicide after another student videotaped him in the school's bathroom and posted the video to social media. From the moment the video was posted, Matthew was mercilessly bullied, harassed and teased by students who had seen the video.

~ Also in 2018, 12-year old girls reached out for help as they were being hounded by their male classmates for nude photos and cyberbullied mercilessly when they said 'no' and reported the sexual harassment to school authorities (who initially did not protect them), resulting in mental distress and self-harm. One of the girls gave testimony.

~ A child with an i.e.p. for depression and anxiety had a nervous breakdown in school, which was filmed and shared online, going viral, resulting in in-person bullying and ridicule in school, on the bus, at sports practice and in the neighborhood.

Finally, new and unregulated AI is a serious threat to our children.

~ The most chilling call for help came from a Maryland mom who had been contacted by the MD Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (MSP), who had been tipped off by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), that her child was on XXX p*rn websites.

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) was made by using AI- taking her head from a family vacation photo as a pre-teen and attaching it to the body of another person, featured on the outside of the XXX p*rn site saying "Undress me with AI". Horrible enough, but even worse, some of the men paying to use the website were also paying to supposedly 'interact' with her fake persona in lewd chatrooms. *One of those men used reverse facial recognition to find her in real life and was trying to contact her- leading to severe anxiety and fear, risking her safety and mental health. It ended up that it was a high school classmate who was spoofing multiple girls and * he was using his phone during school hours to do so.**

(Grace's Law should have given this young man a meaningful correction, but local police did not use it to charge him for unknown reasons). Thankfully, just last year, **the Deep Fake AI portion of SB 360- sponsored by my Senator Hester** was passed to help provide some relief, but more must be done.

Maryland has been at the forefront nationally in passing laws protecting child privacy, well-being and safety, and the swift passage of HB 525, Phone-Free Schools Act is the next needed step

Thank you for your consideration.

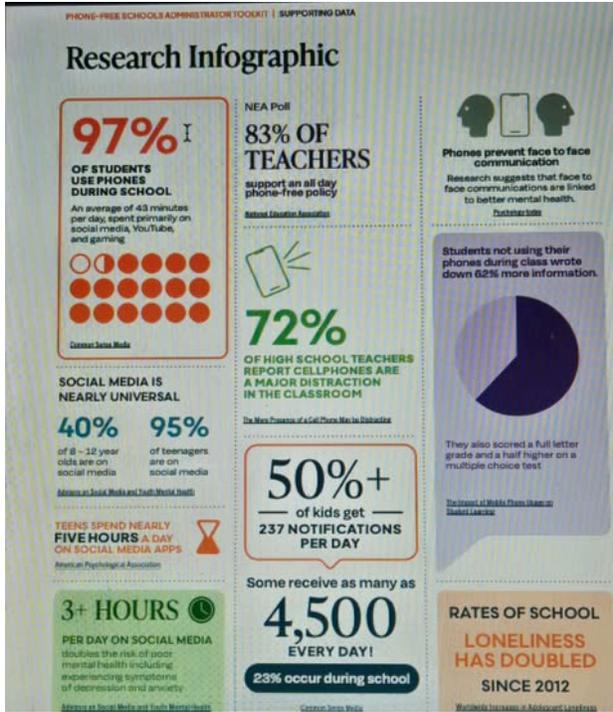
Christine McComas

Grace McComas



Stats from Phone-Free Schools Administrator Toolkit:





BUSINESS > TECH • 4 MIN READ

Lawyers set to argue that Instagram and YouTube intentionally addicted and harmed teen in landmark social media trial

UPDATED 3 HR AGO

By  [Clare Duffy](#)



CUzupus Testimony in Support of SB0928.pdf

Uploaded by: Colleen Uzupus

Position: FAV

SB0928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)
Submitted By: Colleen Uzupus

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

I am a Baltimore County mother of two elementary students, school nurse in Baltimore County Public Schools, and community volunteer. I am submitting testimony in support of SB0928 - The Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act. I commend Senator Harris and the bill's co-sponsors for their leadership in proposing this rigorous bill including K-12 prohibition on personal devices during the instructional day and mandated storage so the devices are inaccessible.

As a parent, I prioritize shared experiences, personal interactions, and opportunities for independence and growth away from screens. I role model healthy use of phones and screens for my children. To sponsor this bill, I know that you are well aware of the research regarding the pervasiveness of phones into the lives of school aged children and the detriments to their educational, social, and emotional development.

I wanted to share MY own experience in Baltimore County Public Schools, where there is an "off and away" policy in place this school year and why this is simply insufficient. I work as a floating substitute nurse in BCPS, covering the health offices of elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the county. I frequently find students on their phones while waiting to see the nurse. I will remind them that the BCPS policy applies to the health room as well and the students will respectfully put their phones away . . . until 5 minutes later when I have to repeat my reminder. These children are not being defiant; when reminded, they sheepishly put them away again. They are already habituated to pull their phones out in a situation where they are expected to wait patiently. Even my middle school students, 11-14 year old kids, are unable to sit with their thoughts or health based reading materials. May I repeat, **these children are not being defiant, disrespectful, or contradictory. They are just unable to resist the temptation of the screen in their pocket.** This is why "off and away" is insufficient and phones need to be inaccessible for the school day.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of The Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act. I am grateful that my legislators are addressing this now; there is no time to wait.

Sincerely,

Colleen Uzupus

Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Daniel Barash

Position: FAV

3/2/2026

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and esteemed members of the committee:

My name is Daniel Barash and I have a 6th grader in MCPS as well as being a graduate from MCPS schools from K-12 (go RM Rockets!). Additionally, my wife has worked as a school counselor in MCPS for over 15 years.

I first want to thank Senators Harris, Charles, A. Washington, and Carozza for championing this important bill.

I support the amended House Bill 525, which removed exceptions for emergency use and added language to ensure devices are inaccessible during the instructional day.

This bill is important to me for as I strongly believe we are going to look back in some time and realize that phones/social media are the cigarettes of the present. Any rules to limit such devices at school are in everyone's best interest. I would like my daughter to have conversations with her peers instead of them all bunched together scrolling through Instagram reels. Teachers won't have to deal with students not paying attention to those on their phones. There is no practical or logical reason to vote against this bill, other than politics.

Thank you for your time and I urge this committee to support this bill.

Best,

Daniel Barash

Bill 928_532 Testimony - phone free Schools.PDF

Uploaded by: Erin Mathis

Position: FAV

HB0525 – County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable) before Ways and Means Committee

Submitted By: Erin Mathis, Ph.D.

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and esteemed members of the committee,

My name is Erin Mathis, Ph.D., and I am a child psychologist and mother of two children. I have made children's mental health and raising healthy, resilient kids my life's work and top priority. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 928.

I would first like to sincerely thank Mary Beth Carozza, Kevin Harris, Nick Charles, and Alonzo Washington for championing this important legislation and for their leadership in prioritizing the well-being of Maryland's children.

I support Senate Bill 928, particularly in light of the amendments made to its cross-filed companion, Maryland House Bill 525, which removed broad emergency-use exceptions and added clear language ensuring that personal electronic devices must be stored in a way that makes them inaccessible to students during the instructional day. These changes strengthen the bill significantly and align it with what we know from both research and clinical practice.

A K-12 prohibition on personal electronic devices during the instructional day is not about punishment or control — it is about creating developmentally appropriate learning environments. As a psychologist, I see firsthand the impact of constant digital access on children's attention, impulse control, anxiety levels, peer relationships, and overall mental health. The presence of a phone — even when not actively in use — divides attention and increases cognitive load. For many children, the pull of notifications, social comparison, and online conflict makes it nearly impossible to be fully present in the classroom.

Mandated storage that ensures devices are truly inaccessible is critical. Policies that allow phones to remain in pockets or backpacks are difficult to enforce and create ongoing tension between teachers and students. When devices are securely stored for the full instructional day, the burden is lifted from educators, and students are freed from the constant psychological pull of their phones. This creates calmer classrooms, improves focus, and reduces opportunities for cyberbullying, social media conflict, and inappropriate content sharing during school hours.

The bill's limited and clearly defined exceptions are also essential. Allowing access for students with IEPs or 504 plans, documented medical needs, language translation tools, or specific caregiver-related circumstances ensures that we protect vulnerable students while maintaining the integrity of the policy. Thoughtful accommodations reflect an understanding that equity and structure can coexist.

Finally, prohibiting social media use during the school day is especially important. Social media platforms are designed to maximize engagement, not to support healthy adolescent development. They amplify social comparison, exclusion, and conflict — often in real time. When social media is active in schools, it extends peer drama into every corner of the building, leaving students with no psychological break. Schools should be a place where children can focus on learning, build in-person social skills, and experience relational repair face-to-face.

Children and adolescents are still developing executive functioning skills, emotional regulation, and identity. It is not reasonable to expect them to consistently self-regulate access to devices and platforms that are intentionally engineered to capture and hold their attention. As adults, it is our responsibility to set healthy boundaries that support their development.

Senate Bill 928 provides a clear, consistent statewide framework that prioritizes attention, safety, and mental health in Maryland's schools. As a child psychologist and as someone deeply committed to raising healthy children, I strongly support this legislation and urge the Committee to give it a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maryland's children.

Erin Mathis, Ph.D

Kensington, MD

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB928.pdf

Uploaded by: Jacqueline Alyea

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB928

Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone–Free Schools Act)

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Date: March 2, 2026

Position: Support

Good afternoon,

My name is Jacqueline Alyea and I am a School Counselor at Owings Mills High School and parent of a student in BCPS. I support Senate Bill SB928 Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone–Free Schools Act).

Over the last ten years of working with high school students I have seen an extreme increase in phone use. It would be difficult to find a person who works in the school system and has not seen phones as a problem. Our district put forward phone restrictions during class this year, but the implementation has been difficult to enforce without clear parameters. Students need to consistently have their phones physically away and without the possibility of distraction. We know that adolescent brains are often not capable of the self control required to be off their phones. It is time for the adults to step in and remove the temptation. A bill this strong would make it easier for teachers to enforce technology restrictions.

Two years ago our school did a screen time reduction challenge. According to data self-reported from students, kids were on their phones an average of 7.7 hours a day. 14% of students reported screen times of over 12 hours a day, with the highest screentime exceeding 18 hours a day. We know too much about the impact of phone usage on developing brains to allow students to use phones as much as they are able to.

I recognize the pushback this bill would likely receive from students and potentially families, but the benefits far outweigh the negatives. As a school staff person and parent of a school-aged child, I ask for a **FAVORABLE REPORT** on SB928.

Jacqueline Alyea

jgalyea@gmail.com

260304 - SB0928 - Oral Testimony .pdf

Uploaded by: James Frank

Position: FAV

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is James Frank. I left teaching at Baltimore County Public Schools, in large part because of the effects of cell phone use. Today, twenty years later, I'm a parent of two middle schoolers in that same system, and I can't believe how much worse things have gotten in our classrooms.

I'm here in strong support of eliminating student cell phone access during school hours.

In my classroom in 2004, phones were a hidden communication channel throughout the school day. Students texted under desks to coordinate fights and harass one another. Adults couldn't intervene in social dynamics until it was too late. In one instance, I was injured intervening in a fight that had been planned through phone communication during instructional time. The pattern was clear: teachers were ineffective because there was a separate and hidden communication channel distracting students and preventing real time conflict resolution.

Today, as a parent, I see that same dynamic intensified by smartphones and school-issued devices. My own children were failing classes last year because they were able to bypass content blocks on their school laptops and spend instructional time on YouTube and social gaming with friends. We only saw their grades recover once access was restricted. The issue isn't just distraction. It's private access any time a student feels the urge to open a device full of addictive content. Academic disengagement, social pressure, and online conflict unfold throughout the day outside of adult awareness. Trust in the system disintegrates.

Policies that allow partial access or rely on expectation alone tend to result in uneven enforcement and predictable workarounds. Students adapt quickly. The hidden channel remains open.

A clear bell-to-bell policy with inaccessible storage closes that channel. It restores focus to learning, supports educators, and protects students from pressures that do not belong in the school day.

This is about safety, attention, and creating an environment where students can actually be present and learn.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your time.

260304 - SB0928 - Written Testimony .pdf

Uploaded by: James Frank

Position: FAV

SB928 – County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted by: James Frank

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

Thank you, Senators Harris, Charles, A. Washington, and Carozza, for bringing SB928 forward. I testified before Ways and Means two weeks ago in support of the cross-filed House Bill 525. The amendment requiring devices to be inaccessible during the instructional day is what makes this policy effective. Without bell-to-bell clarity, enforcement becomes inconsistent and the policy loses all effectiveness.

I am the parent of two children at Catonsville Middle School, a lifelong educator, and now the director of a fully outdoor, tech-free summer camp. I support this bill because I have seen, across multiple settings, what digital access does to attention, behavior, and development.

Attached is a photograph taken in the lobby of my children’s school. The sign clearly states, “Cell phones should be off and out of sight. Earbuds/headphones are prohibited.” The expectation is visible and well-intentioned.

But after more than two and a half decades of working with children, I can assure you that the word “should” has a very specific response in adolescent language. It roughly means, “challenge accepted.”

Kids are highly attuned to the difference between a firm boundary and a hopeful suggestion. “Should” invites negotiation. “Must” signals clarity and consequences. If devices remain in pockets and backpacks, students understand that the rule ultimately depends on whether an adult happens to notice. They turn in “dummy phones” at the door, hide the real device in their lap, or, as I’ve seen in some classrooms, simply use them openly during a lesson. Giving a building full of hundreds of adolescents the space to interpret the word “should” is not an effective strategy.

This is not a failure of teacher leadership. It is a systemic problem. When devices remain physically accessible to students throughout the day, the temptation and social pressure to use them persist. “Off and out of sight” is difficult to monitor and enforce consistently in a busy school building. In fact, our principal recently shared with the PTSA that nine out of ten behavioral incidents in the building involve cell phone use in some way.

In 2005 as a teacher at BCPS, I saw exactly how phones can escalate conflict. Early in November, students coordinated a fight during the school day through text messaging. It

was the seventh time they'd done so that year. In each instance, by the time adults were aware, it was already unfolding. I was injured intervening when one erupted in my homeroom. This is all to point out that when students have a hidden, real-time communication channel in their pockets, situations can intensify faster than staff can respond. Bell-to-bell inaccessibility removes that parallel communication system and keeps schools safer and classrooms focused.

Students do not need personal electronic devices during the school day. Previous generations relied on school staff when off-site communication was necessary. That structure reinforced trust between families and schools and required children to work through normal stress and peer conflict within the building.

When a child can immediately text home during moments of discomfort, they bypass opportunities to practice self-regulation and independence. This is why at my summer camp children have no access to devices- It's a break from how things are at school. When challenges arise, they speak directly with peers and supervising adults. Parents are contacted by staff when appropriate. What develops is resilience, maturity, and stronger interpersonal competence. Parents also appreciate the communication and third-party insight they gain from speaking with their children's caregivers. Everyone wins.

My experience in public education over more than 20 years reinforces the benefits of reduced access to technology. When I began teaching in Baltimore County in the early 2000s, technology was intentional and limited. Laptops were locked in carts and used for specific projects. Post-COVID, routine daily device access expanded dramatically. My "tween" sons do not have phones, but even they have experienced declining grades when devices were made regularly available to them in the classroom. They and their friends constantly figured out workarounds to access games and videos during class on their school-issued laptops. The result was failing grades across the board. Once the devices were removed and paper-based work resumed, their performance rebounded. When the computers were reintroduced, grades declined again. This is to demonstrate the effect that digital access has overall, and if school-issued devices are difficult to manage, personal cell phones with their endless supply of distractions present even greater challenges.

If we truly believe Maryland's students deserve focused classrooms and safer schools, then cell phones simply do not belong there with them.

I respectfully urge your support of SB928 as it provides the clarity children need for focus and success in school, and in life.

Bell-to-bell. Inaccessible. Consistent.

Attachment: Image of reminder message in school lobby



SB928 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Jeremy Joseph

Position: FAV

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
Written Testimony (Favorable)
Submitted By: Jeremy Joseph, MCPS Parent

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

This is MUST-PASS legislation for our kids and the economic future of the state. Away-all-day policies for all K-12 schools during the full instructional day (away and inaccessible ALL day, including lunch and passing time and free periods) with limited exceptions for kids that actually need phones (IEPs, 504s, medical needs, language tools, caregivers).

I am a parent of two children in the MCPS system, including one child in high school. I have seen firsthand on visits to my kids' school the negative impacts on learning, behavior, and socialization that having smartphones anywhere in the school during the school day has on their learning and experience. Children sit in class with earbuds in, fully 20% of the classroom time I attended at the high school (10 minutes out of 45 minutes) was taken up dealing with phones (placing them in pouches, retrieving them, policing them). The only solution is having a law that the phones must be away and inaccessible all day, including during passing time, free periods, and lunch.

The funding that is budget to schools is being wasted on kids who are online and not paying attention or making new friends or connections at school.

Thank you!

Jeremy Joseph
Bethesda, MD

SB0928_Comments - distraction free schools.pdf

Uploaded by: Jessica Garratt

Position: FAV

SB0928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted By: Jessica Garratt, representative of Smartphone Free Childhood UP (University Park, Prince George's County, MD)

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Jessica Garratt and I am a parent of one daughter attending a Prince George's County Public School, in the 4th grade. In addition, I am part of a community of 64 concerned parents called Smartphone Free Childhood UP, in our University Park, MD, neighborhood. This group strives to foster community for kids around outdoor play, increased freedom for kids to explore and socialize in age-appropriate ways that don't involve screens, and create community among parents for whom solidarity helps to navigate the screen-dominant culture we increasingly live in. Our group was inspired and motivated by the mental health toll smartphone access has had on our youth as documented in [*The Anxious Generation* by Johnathan Haidt](#).

Our group is grateful to Senator Harris and fellow co-sponsors for putting forward a phones-in-schools bill this session. Maryland is only one of very few 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. Passing bill SB0928 would thankfully get Maryland to an "A" grade.

We are very heartened that such a bill would prohibit the use of personal mobile devices throughout the entire instructional day – including transition times, lunch, and recess – for all kids, K-12. Some believe that high schools are of an age where they need to learn to manage their devices, but we 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 and 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 for elementary and middle school students. Even at the elementary school level, we've witnessed kids being absorbed in their smart watches and devices both outside of school and during school hours including recess, interrupting times meant for learning and spontaneous play.

Smartphone Free Childhood UP also believes that an important feature of SB0928 is the one that requires school districts to include in their policies storage options that ensure devices are *inaccessible to students* during the instructional school day. School districts

can retain the discretion to devise which storage solution works with their operating budgets, as options range from higher-cost options such as phone lockers, to low-cost options such as 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.

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 astonishingly 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 cultivating the skills necessary to navigate this quickly shifting landscape. The core skills have not changed: strong cognitive reasoning; strong reading and writing ability; and social-emotional and relationship skills. Technology – especially smartphones – has proven to be a 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.

As parents, teachers, and concerned community members, we urge you to support this legislation to create boundaries on personal mobile devices. We want to see our children and schools thrive.

With gratitude for your work,

Jessica Garratt for Smartphone Free Childhood UP
University Park, MD

Finisdore testimony to sb0928.pdf

Uploaded by: John Finisdore

Position: FAV

B 928 – County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment
Written Testimony – Favorable

Submitted by: John Finisdore

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

I write in strong support of SB 928 as a parent of two children in the Maryland public school system and as someone with substantial professional knowledge of technology and its impacts. I appreciate the Committee's consideration of this important legislation and urge a favourable report.

First, I would like to thank Senators Harris, Charles, A. Washington, and Carozza for championing this bill and for their thoughtful work to strengthen it. I am particularly supportive of the amendments made to the cross-filed House Bill 525, which removed broad exceptions for emergency use and added clear language requiring that personal electronic communication devices be inaccessible during the instructional day. These changes meaningfully improve the bill and ensure that its intent can be implemented consistently and effectively across school systems.

A statewide K–12 prohibition on personal electronic communication devices during the instructional day is long overdue. Smartphones and similar devices are intentionally designed to capture attention and interrupt focus. In classrooms, this directly undermines learning by distracting students, fragmenting their attention, and reducing meaningful engagement with teachers and peers. Even when devices are not actively being used, their presence alone creates a constant cognitive pull that interferes with instruction.

Equally important is the requirement for mandated storage that ensures devices are truly inaccessible during the school day. Policies that allow phones to remain in pockets or backpacks are difficult to enforce and place an unreasonable burden on teachers, who should be focused on teaching rather than policing device use. Clear, uniform storage requirements remove ambiguity, support consistent enforcement, and create a calmer, more focused learning environment for all students.

I also strongly support the limited and well-defined exceptions included in the bill. Accommodations for students with IEPs or 504 plans, documented medical needs, language translation tools, or necessary communication with caregivers are appropriate and necessary. These exceptions ensure equity and accessibility while preserving the overall integrity of a phone-free instructional day.

Finally, the prohibition on social media use at school is a critical component of this legislation. Social media platforms contribute significantly to anxiety, cyberbullying, and social pressure among students. Limiting access during the school day helps protect

student well-being and reinforces schools as places for learning, not constant online engagement.

SB 928 strikes the right balance between protecting instructional time, supporting student mental health, and allowing for necessary accommodations. I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill and help Maryland move toward healthier, more focused learning environments for our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. P. ...', written over a light gray rectangular background.

5418 Harwood Rd

Bethesda MD 20814

SB928_Mathis.pdf

Uploaded by: Joshua Mathis

Position: FAV

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

Submitted By: Joshua Mathis, Maryland Resident and Parent of Two

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

My name is **Joshua Mathis**, and I am a **Maryland parent of two young children**. I am submitting this testimony in **strong support** of SB928, which will keep personal cell phones and similar devices **out of reach during the instructional day**.

First, I want to **thank Senators Harris, Charles, A. Washington, and Carozza** for championing this important bill and for prioritizing students' learning and well-being.

I support this legislation **because of the amendments made to the cross-filed House Bill 525**. Those amendments **removed exceptions for emergency use** and added clear language to ensure that student devices are **stored and made inaccessible during the instructional day**. In my view, that clarity is essential—if devices are still accessible, the distractions (and the problems) remain.

This bill matters to our community because it helps give children the chance to learn in a **focused, healthy environment** and it limits access to **inappropriate content on school grounds**. The bill's approach is sensible and balanced:

- It establishes a **K–12 prohibition on personal devices during the instructional day**.
- It requires **mandated storage** so devices are **inaccessible**, not just “put away.”
- It allows **limited, appropriate exceptions**—including for **IEPs, 504 plans, medical needs, language tools, and caregiver-related needs**.
- It includes a **prohibition on social media use at school**, which is a critical guardrail for students' attention and safety.

As a parent, I am deeply concerned about what social media is doing to adolescents in our community—constant comparison, anxiety, distraction, and exposure to harmful content. While my children are still young, I already see how early and how powerfully these platforms shape behavior and peer dynamics. Schools should be places where students can concentrate, engage with teachers and classmates, and build healthy habits—without a device pulling them away every few minutes.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report** on SB928
Thank you for your time and for your service to Maryland's students and families.

Sincerely,

Joshua Mathis

Kensington, Maryland

SB 928

Uploaded by: Kristen Mosbaek

Position: FAV

From: Kristen Mosbaek km@kristenmosbaek.com
Subject: SB928 — Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act
Date: March 2, 2026 at 2:59 PM
To: Senate EEE committee



SB928 — Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act

Written testimony (favorable)
Submitted by: Kristen Mosbaek

March 2, 2026

Dear Members of the **Senate EEE committee**,

My name is Kristen Mosbaek and I am a substitute teacher and a resident of Montgomery County (Bethesda), Maryland. I was an active PTA member during my son's 13 years in Montgomery County Public Schools. My testimony is provided to support Senator Harris's Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act (SB928). This bill will ensure that all such devices are inaccessible to students during the entire school day.

As a K-12 substitute teacher, I can tell you that telling students to put their phone away distracts from my lesson, shames students, and takes up valuable instructional time. It's hard enough to take attendance and teach lessons when you don't know the students. I used to be able to use "phone time" as an incentive for students to finish their assignments. Not now. For the past four years, cell phone use has led to reducing students' self-control. They now have a hard time being quiet long enough for me to explain a lesson and take attendance.

On NPR, I heard a school librarian say that when his school removed phones from the classroom, three times as many students checked out books. Now, that's progress. Passing bill SB928 is an opportunity to set our students up for success.

~Kristen Mosbaek
Montgomery County resident & teacher

SB928_MSEA_Lamb_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Lauren Lamb

Position: FAV

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 928
County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device
Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
March 4, 2026

Lauren Lamb
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 928, which would require each county board of education to develop and implement, not later than the 2027-2028 school year, a policy limiting the use of cell phones and social media by a student during the academic school day. It includes reasonable exceptions for needs documented in a student's individual education program and for health, emergency, or educational purposes.

MSEA represents 75,000 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.¹ 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.^{2 3}

¹ National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

² National Education Association. Internal member polling (2024).

³ 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>

Adolescents are increasingly spending large portions of their days using phones or other devices: according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, U.S. children ages 8-12 are using devices or in front of screens for an average of 4-6 hours each day, and children over 13 reach up to 9 hours of screen time each day.⁴

It is impractical and often ineffective to enforce restrictions on cell phone usage when policies vary on a classroom-by-classroom basis. We appreciate this bill's recognition that enforcement must not be left up to individual educators; rather, schools need widely observed norms led by system leaders and administrators. We encourage that the regularly updated policies referenced in the bill include input from local bargaining units. This bill's balanced approach will support effective implementation while accommodating the needs of students, families, and school employees.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 928.

⁴ 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

3_2_26 Testimony - Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act

Uploaded by: Lindsay Unger

Position: FAV

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted By: Lindsay Unger

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

My name is Lindsay Unger and I am a parent of two children in the Howard County Public School System. Within the 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. Prohibiting personal device usage in our classrooms is a critical public health need and I am extremely grateful for those who have joined this effort and/or advocated for this issue.

SB928 includes key characteristics that are critical in a safe, healthy, and learning-forward policy: 1) it's for the full school day, bell-to-bell, 2) it's for all grades, K-12, 3) it requires the devices fully inaccessible to students and 4) it has exceptions for IEP/504 plans but NOT emergencies and instructional use. Inclusions of these specific elements align with the research we have available to us from child development experts, neuroscientists, and mental health and safety professionals. There are countless publications and expert testimonials all pointing toward the same conclusion. I will share a few references from experts and my own anecdote as a professional career coach at a prominent business school and a member of a district with a policy that is too lenient.

"The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Haidt leverages extensive research to make 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 and will be perpetuated with Gen Alpha.

The National Education Association conducted a survey in spring 2024 of 2,889 members working in elementary, middle, and high schools. The published report states 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."

Regarding the need for inaccessibility, this is for two primary purposes. The first point is named in the title of Adrian Ward et. al's 2017 paper, "Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity". We have to remember, these devices are designed to maximize engagement and that is why they are addictive and inherently distracting. Second, inaccessibility removes the burden of policy management from the teachers. Anecdotally, this is one of the challenges observed in Howard County with our current policy. There is inconsistent implementation of the policy due to the devices still being physically present in the classroom, putting the burden of noticing and responding to a policy violation on the classroom instructors. I'm sure you can imagine that needing to confront a student trying to access a device that they are addicted to could be a contentious and an ideally avoidable interaction. We are asking too much of our students and teachers when it comes to allowing students to keep their addictive devices on their person or in their classrooms but not access them.

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.

In support of the point regarding bell-to-bell restriction, I will share my own professional anecdote. As a career coach of business students, I have witnessed the first hand impacts of technology on their career readiness. One area in which there is evident impact is in communication skills and ability to engage and socialize with confidence and ease. I am currently developing a workshop that teaches conversation flow and how to fluidly ask questions in an informational interview. The content is so granular it features basic communication norms such as how to physically and verbally convey engagement. This has become a heightened need observed not only in my specific environment but one discussed among my colleagues across higher education. Students are appearing socially withdrawn and uncomfortable with seemingly basic social interactions. By making personal devices inaccessible from bell-to-bell, we give students a safe and consistent space to engage with their peers and educators in between classes and during the lunch hour without a shield that can strip away their opportunity to develop these communication and social skills necessary to be successful in life.

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, mental health and safety whose input should be weighted the most. We watch as whole nations around the world pass national legislation prohibiting personal device use in schools, most recently Brazil and South Korea - and neighboring states are following suit - Maryland is falling behind. We can do better for our students. Fortunately, 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. Without the specific parameters laid out in this bill, the legislation leaves too many children without health and safety guardrails that are critical to their educational success and development of life skills. Please take this opportunity to make a tremendous difference in the lives of Maryland children.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Unger

2026-03-02 Stickler SB928 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Meredith Stickler

Position: FAV

**SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use
Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
Written Testimony (Favorable) before Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Submitted By: Meredith Stickler**

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

I am a parent of two Montgomery County Public Schools elementary school students, and I have observed with concern how parents of older children have struggled to control their children's use of cell phones and access to and use of social media applications. The addictive nature and negative impacts of these technologies on children's social, emotional, and academic development are becoming increasingly clear, as highlighted by the 2024 Surgeon General's Report on Social Media and Youth Mental Health¹ and pending litigation, including the suit filed by 41 Attorneys General including Attorney General Brown claiming that Meta intentionally designed its applications "to be addictive to children and teenagers, leading to excessive engagement and contributing to the mental-health crisis".^{2,3}

Despite the documented negative impacts of excessive smart phone and social media use on children's mental health and learning, parents and schools have largely been left to manage this epidemic alone. I am counting on you to protect my children from this harm before it is too late.

I am therefore honored to testify in support of Senate Bill 928 (and the cross-filed House Bill 525), and I would like to thank Senators Harris, Charles, A. Washington, and Carozza for championing this important bill. This bill represents what all students in Maryland need to learn, grow, and engage meaningfully with their school community: a K-12 prohibition on personal mobile devices throughout the entire school day, mandating inaccessible storage to take the pressure off of teachers (and parents), with only limited exceptions (for IEPs, 504s, medical needs, language tools, caregivers, in line with emerging good practice) to take the pressure off of administrators, and a prohibition on social media use at school. As Chief Superintendent Wright pointed out in her presentation to the State Board of Education last August, this is by far the most effective policy for learning and for educators.

The inaccessibility requirement is especially important to ensure that the bill's intended impacts are achieved – phones and social media are too addictive to be accessed during the school day. I support this bill based on the amendments made to the cross-filed House Bill 525, which removed exceptions for emergency use and added language to ensure devices are inaccessible during the instructional day – ideally, physically out of reach of students to avoid costly personal device locks that have already been outsmarted by teenagers around the country.

¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/youth-mental-health/social-media/index.html>

² 2023 Year in Review | Office of the New York State Attorney General Letitia James. Access 3/2/2026 [here](#).

³ <https://oag.maryland.gov/News/Documents/2023/102423.pdf>

I am grateful to Delegate Boafu, as well as the sponsors of other similar bills, for continuing to take action on this critical issue. Maryland is making a number of strong investments in education. However, those investments will not have the intended effect if students are distracted by addictive personal devices. Senate Bill 928 (and the cross-filed House Bill 525) is aligned with the science of learning and *with what the majority of Maryland parents and educators want*. It provides a consistent policy to maximize children's potential in all Maryland's school districts.

Therefore, I urge this committee to support this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Stickler', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Meredith Stickler

(Chandra-favorable) SB928-MD Phone-Free Schools Ac

Uploaded by: Mickie Chandra

Position: FAV

March 4th, 2026

Esteemed members of the Maryland General Assembly,

My name is Mickie Chandra and I am a resident of Montgomery County, Maryland. I am an active member of the PTA at the local, county (MCCPTA), and state (FSPTA) levels. My testimony is provided to support the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act (SB928).

As a mother of two children in public school, an advocate for school communities, and an educator with significant classroom experience, I have witnessed first hand the consequences of substandard school cell phone policies. Despite the push by school districts to address the distractions introduced during the school day by cell phones and other personal mobile devices (PMD), outcomes to upgraded policies this school year have failed to fulfill what they were designed to do. We need a policy that can be realistically enforced.

My testimony offers perspectives and evidence that underpin the various facets of what has been a complex environment to navigate in order to restore the integrity of instructional time and achieve distraction free schools.

2025 as a Turning Point

Districts universally have reached a turning point in the awareness of the totality of harm children face online and the spillover effects in every aspect of home and school life. We now have the data to back it up. A report released by Phones in Focus, author and researcher Angela Duckworth embarked on a project that involved collecting data from educators on school cell phone policies with the goal of developing longitudinal evidence on the specific policies that produce the best student outcomes. Governors reviewed the survey and unanimously agreed that we must take existing policies further: Governors Focus on Distraction-Free Learning - National Governors Association.

There is agreement that the benefits of a phone policy that works results in:

- Fewer distractions = better learning and participation
- Teachers can teach without interruptions
- Research shows that less screen time promotes social-emotional well-being
- Classrooms run more smoothly
- Everyone benefits from a more respectful, focused environment

In 2025 school districts across Maryland renewed their efforts to uphold or update preexisting policies around students' use of cell phones¹. While attempting to address the growing distractions in the classroom and threats to safety, updates to policy also broadly aim to support the academic, physical, emotional, and mental health of students by reducing the impact of social media and phone usage on their well-being.

In retrospect, the response to these policy updates has varied. At best, some schools and classrooms improved only later to regress. Where the school policy did not produce intended

results during instructional time, or in the classroom, the difference was due to the accessibility of the cell phone. Storage methods for devices matter to the effectiveness of any policy, including bell-to-bell. As Dr. Duckworth presented to Governors: “Findings suggest that where phones are stored during the school day may matter as much as when students are forbidden from using them, and in terms of teacher satisfaction: the stricter the policy, the better.”

Use Case Review Based on Regulations and Cell Phone Policy Updates in 2025

A Superior Storage Model - The Bell-to-Bell Cart Model -

Advocates in Montgomery County who cast a wide net in receiving feedback on the updated cell phone regulation in that district reported that the school with the most success in implementation had the foresight of the unique needs of the students and teachers at the school to know that nothing less than a bell-to-bell policy was needed. The storage for that school is known as the “cart model”, where cell phones are administratively gathered before the first bell and secured until the student retrieves the phone after the last class. Further, cell phone policies that support overall student well-being must consider the ongoing inappropriate uses during lunch and transitions. Allowing cell phone access during on-campus lunch provides opportunities for bullying and harassment.

The Typical Storage Mechanism for District Policies - Off and Away -

Looking at one generic policy known as Off And Away, PMDs are required to be turned off and out of sight and reach, typically placed in a backpack or caddy in the classroom. In contrast to the intentions of this particular policy, it was observed that cell phones were increasingly neither off nor away for a significant portion of the time as the school year progressed. In other words, PMDs became easier to access and use during instructional time. The policy did not work as intended, as it could not rely on students to self-enforce, and the burden of addressing violations was left to the teachers. Off And Away, though well intended, became unenforceable.

In contrast to Off And Away, policies that were the most successful solved both issues of (1) student proximity to the PMD and (2) ease of access. Therefore, the policy must include an effective means of storage in order to enforce the intent of the policy, specifically to address unauthorized PMD use.

Teachers and SROs Fail at Tracking Devices Within and Outside of the Classroom

In response to the report produced by Phones in Focus, Maryland State Governor Wes. Moore stated: "We can't afford to ignore what educators are telling us. This survey makes it clear that the people closest to our students are sounding the alarm about the impact of phones in the classroom—and they're pointing us toward solutions that work. In Maryland, we are committed to putting educator voice at the center of our decisions, and we'll continue to act urgently to make sure our classrooms are places where students and educators alike can focus and thrive."

Teachers overwhelmingly support a bell-to-bell policy as the most tenable cell phone policy, as managing student adherence to policy is inherently flawed due to the difficulty of carrying out instructional duties and managing classroom behavior that includes the third factor of managing devices that are within reach of students.

SROs Contest the “Safety” Argument.

SROs in addressing positions that support Off and Away and similar policies, have confirmed that anything other than a policy that resolves the Proximity and Accessibility issues detailed earlier in this bill leads to a reduction in student safety. The following statement was officially announced by the National Association of School Resource Officers last month: “NASRO is extremely supportive of a statewide bell-to-bell and social media free policy for grades K-12. We do not support an exception for emergencies. We know that schools, students and staff are safer when student cell phones and personal devices are not present during the school day. For this reason, if students are allowed to bring personal devices to school they should be securely locked away and inaccessible to the student from the first bell to the last bell of the school day.”

Signed Statement of Mo Canady, Executive Director of NASRO Closing the Loophole of Admissible Cell Phone Use

Instructional Use - Authority is granted to the principal or certain school administrators to allow limited cell phone use during class time if the use supports instruction. The difficulty in verifying proper use is apparent when instructional use becomes personal use. The instructional use of cell phones is a “gateway” to unauthorized use where the student would be in violation if caught. An example setting where this occurs is a photography class where the teacher does not have enough school provided supplies and therefore allows students to use the camera app on the smartphone.

E-hallpass App - Schools that use an electronic hall pass system where a student checks out and back in from a main kiosk may not use a system that requires students to download an app that serves as the digital “permission slip”. Examples of permissions include visits to the nurse’s office or to use the restroom. Some students find it difficult to hold themselves accountable to return to the class in time when they are distracted by the apps on the phone.

Lunch and Class Transitions

Policy allowing the use of cell phones at certain times of the day does very little to prevent bullying, and particularly doxing. Students have found an incentive in orchestrating fights in advance with the intention of capturing the fight on their cell phones and uploading this content to the internet.

Access to Social Media

The use of social media is highly disruptive to a student’s ability to focus in the classroom and engage with peers. Districts have placed limits on access to social media platforms through the school’s technology networks. However, these deterrents are not foolproof, particularly when access to cell phones is an issue. Access to phones means access to social media.

Providing Media Literacy - While removing cell phone access during the school day, better education around device and social media use can teach children to be proactive. In accordance with HB1110 (Effective 2019) Health and Safety Best Practices – Digital Devices school districts are encouraged to integrate into their K-12 curriculum age-appropriate instruction and discussion regarding how digital media, including social media, the internet, AI,

and other emerging digital and online technologies, can be built and designed to be manipulative and addictive. The media literacy curriculum should promote to students how they can protect and enhance critical thinking, conduct risk-benefit analysis, and work towards understanding the potential mental and physical health consequences, including disrupting healthy child and adolescent development, that arise from use of social media.

Discipline and Expectations

It should be a requirement to state that students are expected to understand and follow the school cell phone policy responsibly. There must be a clearly defined disciplinary approach if a student violates the school's cell phone policy and steps to re-establish expectations for student behavior.

The Ask: Please pass the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act (SB928)

Prior to the start of the 2026-2027 school year, school districts must have a plan for enforcing cell phone policy that aims to prevent unauthorized use of cell phones in the classroom. Implementation of this policy and adherence to proper device storage should take effect on the first day of school in fall of 2026. We do not have any more time to lose. Please support the legislation that will help us move the needle now, the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act (SB928).

Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience and for investing your time to read my testimony.

Sincerely,
Mickie Chandra

SB928_WrittenTestimony_Favorable_MdPHA.3.4.26.pdf

Uploaded by: Oluwatosin Olateju

Position: FAV



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.

Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)
PO Box 7045 · 6801 Oak Hall Ln · Columbia, MD 21045-9998
GetInfo@MdPHA.org www.mdpha.org 443.475.0242

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).

Testimony in support of SB0928 - Maryland Phone-Fr

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0928_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
03/04/2026
Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703-7134

TESTIMONY ON SB#0928 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

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

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0928, **County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**

Close Up Washington D.C. has analyzed the issue of *The Rise and Impact of Phone Bans in U.S. Public Schools*¹

In recent years, cell phones have moved from novelty to necessity in daily life, but in U.S. public schools, they've also become a battleground. Facing growing concerns about distraction, mental health, and safety, state legislatures and school boards across the country are implementing bans on student phone use during the school day. Supporters say the restrictions restore focus in the classroom and encourage healthier habits; critics worry the rules go too far, limiting freedom and complicating emergency communication. As of 2025, at least 35 states have enacted some form of restriction on student cell phone use...

Research on cell phone bans shows mixed—but as supporters note, promising—results. Some studies link reduced phone use to better academic performance and improved mental health among students.⁵ Teachers often report fewer disruptions and incidents of cyberbullying when phones are removed from the classroom, and parents in advocacy groups see restrictions as a way to build healthier digital boundaries for teens. In some cases, schools also report stronger peer-to-peer interaction, as students spend more time engaging face-to-face.⁶ Supporters of cell phone bans argue that these benefits are worth the trade-off...As Emily Boddy of Smartphone Free Childhood notes, “If kids know that there are other kids who have access to their phones ... there’s always a part of their attention that’s like, ‘What am I missing on Snapchat?’”⁸ For advocates, bell-to-bell bans offer relief from that constant anxiety.

This bill will require each county board of education to develop and implement, not later than the 2027-2028 school year, a policy limiting the use of certain electronic communication devices by a student during the academic school day; and prohibiting the policy from restricting the use of an electronic communication device for purposes documented in a student's individual education program, to address a documented health issue, during an emergency event, for certain educational purposes, to access language translation tools, or to meet caregiving duties.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0928.

¹ <https://www.closeup.org/public-schools-phone-bans/>

SB928 testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Sara Lippa

Position: FAV

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted by: Sara Lippa, PhD, ABPP, Board-Certified Clinical Neuropsychologist

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

My name is Sara Lippa. I am a board-certified clinical neuropsychologist and a parent of two children in Montgomery County Public Schools, currently in grades 2 and 4. I am honored to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 928.

Senate Bill 928 would require inaccessible storage of students' personal electronic communication devices during the school day. This is a critical provision. Without structured storage, device bans are inconsistently implemented, enforcement falls on teachers, and compliance varies classroom to classroom. As State Superintendent Carey Wright noted in her August presentation to the Maryland State Board of Education, structured phone-free policies with secure storage are the most effective approach for improving student learning and supporting educators.¹

In Montgomery County, a prohibition on devices was extended to middle schools this past year without a storage requirement. Predictably, classroom device holders are inconsistently used, enforcement varies, and students continue to access their phones during the school day. This places an unfair burden on teachers and administrators and undermines the intent of the policy.

As both a clinician and a parent, I am deeply concerned about student readiness and long-term outcomes. In Montgomery County, as few as 9% of 10th graders are considered on track to be College and Career Ready.² Colleges across the country report that even high-achieving students struggle to sustain attention, read long-form material, think critically, and write coherently. These are foundational cognitive skills.

Smartphones are not neutral tools in this context. They are intentionally engineered to fragment attention. Notifications, messaging apps, and social media platforms are designed to trigger frequent checking behaviors. Even when unused, the mere presence of a smartphone has been shown to reduce working memory and cognitive capacity.³ From a neuropsychological perspective, sustained attention is a finite resource. The school day should protect and strengthen it—not continuously erode it.

Beyond academics, there is a growing and concerning body of evidence linking excessive screen time and social media use to increased rates of anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and diminished self-esteem in children and adolescents. When phones are accessible during school

¹ Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools, State Board Resolution on Cell Phone Use in Schools (Aug. 26, 2025).

² Adam Pagnucco, Montgomery Perspective, MCPS's Shocking Performance on College and Career Readiness (Apr. 4, 2024).

³ Adrian F. Ward, Kristen Duke, Ayelet Gneezy, and Maarten W. Bos, Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2:2, 140-154. (2017).

hours, peer conflict, cyberbullying, and social comparison do not pause, but expand in hallways and classrooms. This amplifies stress and disrupts the educational environment.

It is essential that we preserve the school day as a protected space, free from personal devices and social media. Only in such an environment can students fully engage in learning, practice face-to-face communication, develop emotional regulation, and build resilience. Childhood and adolescence are brief and formative. Schools must be structured around developmental science—not around devices designed to capture and monetize attention.

Senate Bill 928 aligns with the science of learning, reflects the preferences of the majority of parents and educators,⁴ and provides a clear, consistent standard for all Maryland school districts. Most importantly, it protects the integrity of the school day for every student.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB928.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sara Lippa". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

Sara Lippa, ABPP-CN
Board Certified Clinical Neuropsychologist
Silver Spring, Maryland

⁴ Institute for Families & Technology, Public Opinion Survey on Voters' Views on Phones in Schools (Jan. 20, 2026).

Testimony re SB928 - County Boards of Education -

Uploaded by: Sarah Weber

Position: FAV

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.

SB0928_Testimony_Cross Cashenna.pdf

Uploaded by: Dr Cashenna A Cross

Position: FWA

The Honorable Dr. Cashenna A. Cross
Councilwoman At Large, City of Glenarden, Maryland
RE Senate Bill 928 Maryland Phone Free Schools Act

Determination Favorable With Amendments

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony based solely on my experience in municipal leadership, where public safety, youth development, and accountability in local governance are daily responsibilities. After reviewing Senate Bill 928, I support the intent of this legislation to improve student focus, safety, and academic engagement by limiting personal electronic communication device use during the academic school day.

In local government, we regularly hear from parents, educators, and community stakeholders regarding classroom distraction, cyber related conflicts, and the growing challenges associated with unrestricted device access during instructional hours. Establishing consistent statewide expectations provides clarity for families while supporting school administrators in restoring learning environments centered on academic success.

Several amendments would strengthen implementation and ensure practical and equitable enforcement.

First, the bill should clearly preserve local flexibility so each county board may determine storage and enforcement models appropriate for its facilities, staffing capacity, and grade levels.

Second, emergency communication procedures should be explicitly defined to ensure parents understand how communication will occur during critical incidents while maintaining student safety.

Third, required reporting should emphasize measurable outcomes including discipline equity, school climate, and academic engagement so future adjustments are guided by verified data.

Finally, structured implementation guidance and administrator training support will be essential to prevent inconsistent enforcement across schools.

The prohibition against suspension or expulsion solely for policy violations reflects balanced governance and aligns with restorative approaches that strengthen rather than remove students from learning environments.

From a municipal perspective, strong schools contribute directly to safer communities, higher civic engagement, and long term community stability. When students are focused and supported during the school day, the benefits extend beyond the classroom and into the broader community.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report with amendments on Senate Bill 928.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honorable Dr. Cashenna A. Cross

Councilwoman At Large, City of Glenarden, Maryland

Testimony SB 928 -Student Electronic Communication

Uploaded by: Dawana Sterrette

Position: UNF

**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
In Opposition of Senate Bill 928
County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy
Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**

March 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.

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 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 928 as not needed and urges an unfavorable report.

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

SB928 OPPOSE.pdf

Uploaded by: Grace Wilson

Position: UNF



**SB0928 – COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – STUDENT ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION
DEVICE USE POLICY – ESTABLISHMENT (MARYLAND PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS ACT)**

March 4, 2026

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

OPPOSE

Grace Wilson, Director of Legislation & Policy (410.440.1758)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB0928 – County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**. This bill requires that, no later than the 2027-2028 school year, each county board develop and implement a policy to limit the use of electronic communication devices by students during the academic school day. For the purposes of the bill, academic school day is defined as any structured or unstructured learning experience that occurs from when the first bell rings until the dismissal bell, including instructional periods, lunch, recess, passing periods, and transitional periods.

Such a policy is required to: (1) prohibit a student from using an electronic communication device during the academic school day; (2) require a student to store (secure in a manner determined by the county board) the student's electronic communication device during the academic day; (3) prohibit a student from using the social media applications and social media websites determined by the county board during the academic school day; and (4) require administrator approval for the use of a personal electronic communication device for educational purposes when a school-issued electronic device is unavailable. The policy developed by the county board must also permit a student to use an electronic communication device: (1) for any purpose documented in the student's individualized education plan or 504 plan; (2) to monitor or address a student's documented health issue; (3) during an emergency event, if expressly authorized by an administrator; (4) when directed by an administrator for educational purposes; (5) to access language translation tools to ensure educational equity for multilingual students when school-issued communication devices are not available or sufficient; or (6) for the purpose of meeting caregiving responsibilities, as approved by a principal. The policy developed by the county board is required to include tiered disciplinary measures, not to include suspension or expulsion. Additionally, each county board is required to engage parents, students, educators, and community stakeholders in the development of the policy, and publish and make the policy available in multiple languages in the student handbook, on the school's and county board's website, and at school events.

AACPS opposes this bill which would infringe upon local control of educational policy regarding student use of personal electronic devices. Local governance of 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 and are best able to 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. The Board and AACPS oppose this legislative proposal to circumscribe the board's authority to establish local policy on this matter.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on SB0928.

SB 928 - Oppose - Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act.

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: Senate Bill 928
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
HEARING DATE: March 4, 2026
POSITION: UNFAVORABLE
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the 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 928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act).**

Senate Bill 928 requires each county board must develop and implement a policy limiting the use of electronic communication devices by students during the academic school day. The policy must: (1) prohibit a student from using an electronic communication device during the academic school day; (2) require a student to store the student’s electronic communication device during the academic school day; (3) prohibit a student from using the social media during the academic school day; and (4) require administrator approval for the use of a personal electronic communication device for educational purposes when a school-issued electronic communication device is unavailable. The bill provides certain exceptions, including if the device is needed for an IEP or 504 Plan, when authorized during an emergency, to monitor a student’s health, and to access language transition services as necessary, and for caregiver responsibilities. SB 928 also includes disciplinary parameters: the policies must be tiered and enforced by an administrator, and may not include suspension or expulsion solely for a violation of the policy.

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 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.

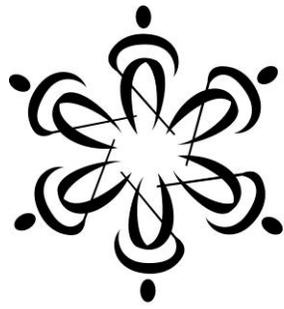
Additionally, SB 928’s mandate that students store their personal electronic devices during school day hours would require school systems to purchase storage lockers, cabinets, and/or pouches for this purpose. Yet, there is no funding source attached to SB 928. School budgets are stretched thin, and as noted, most already have a cell phone policy in place. It is unnecessary to legislate a one-size fits all policy statewide.

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 928**.

3-4-2026 Unfavorable SB0928 device use.pdf

Uploaded by: Ronza Othman

Position: UNF



NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND
MARYLAND

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

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 SB0928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act). 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 IEPs and 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.

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

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 IEPs or 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 or IEPs.

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.

While creating environments free from distractions and helping students focus are important goals, this should be done through effective classroom management, not on the backs of students with disabilities who depend on technology for access and information. We all know that the disability carve-out will not work – it'll just eliminate confidentiality and privacy with regard to disability for those who depend on these devices due to their disabilities and subject an already vulnerable population to bullying and criticism.

For those reasons, we ask for an unfavorable report on SB0928. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.

SB 928 - County Boards of Education - Student Elec

Uploaded by: Zaniah Anderson

Position: UNF



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

BILL: SB 928
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
DATE: March 4, 2026
POSITION: Unfavorable
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **opposes** Senate Bill 928

This bill requires each local board of education to develop and implement, by the 2027-2028 school year, a policy to prohibit the use of cellular phones by students during the academic school day, which is defined as any time during the school day, including a student's lunch, recess, or passing period. The policy must also require students to store their phones in a secure place during instructional time and prohibit a student from using social media applications and websites as determined by the local school board during school hours. The policy may not prohibit a student from using a phone (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; (3) during an emergency event, if expressly authorized by an administrator; (4) when directed by an education or administrator for educational purposes; (5) to access language translation tools when a school-issued device is not available; or (6) for the purpose of meeting caregiving responsibilities, as approved by the principal. The policy must also establish administrator-enforced tiered disciplinary measures for violations, excluding suspension or expulsion solely for violating the policy. The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

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 928 and kindly requests an **unfavorable** report.

FINAL_GOC Letter of Information (SB 928).pdf

Uploaded by: Andrea Barnes

Position: INFO

March 4, 2026

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

RE: Senate Bill (SB) 928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act) - Letter of Information

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

The Governor's Office for Children (the Office) respectfully submits this letter of information for Senate Bill 0928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act). SB 0928 would require each county board of education to develop and implement, not later than the 2027-2028 school year, a policy limiting the use of certain electronic communication devices by a student during the academic school day.

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.¹ 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.² 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.³

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" restrictions where phones are prohibited during the school day hours can reduce⁴ unexcused absences and provide the most comprehensive⁵ environment for focus and social interaction

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

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

³See footnote 1

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

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



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.⁶

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.⁷

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.

Sincerely,



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

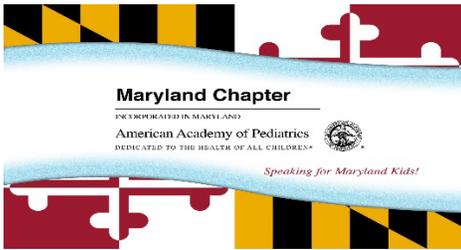
⁶<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/survey-parents-and-teens-support-school-cellphone-bans-and-most-dont-perceive-major-downsides/>

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

SB0928_LOI_MDAAP_CBOE - Student Electronic Communi

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: INFO



Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 4, 2026

Senate Bill 928 – *County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)*

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 928.

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
Andrew G. Vetter
410-244-7000

SB0928 - State Board & MSDE - LOI.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Stefan Redding-Lallinger

Position: INFO

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

BILL: SB0928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication
Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

DATE: March 4, 2026

POSITION: Letter of Information

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) would like to share the following information regarding SB0928, which would require county boards of education to develop, adopt, and publish a policy limiting the use of personal electronic devices during school hours.

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 **SB0928**. 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, or Hannah Oakley, Deputy Director of the State Board, at hannah.oakley@maryland.gov, if you would like any additional information.