



**Committee:** Ways and Means

**Bill Number:** House Bill 163 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements

**Hearing Date:** February 5, 2026

**Position:** Support

---

On behalf of the Maryland School Counselor Association (MSCA), which represents school counselors across the State committed to the academic, career, and social–emotional development of all students, we respectfully request a **favorable report on HB 163**.

HB 163 requires each county board of education to develop and adopt a policy restricting or limiting the use of personal electronic devices during school hours while protecting necessary educational and health-related use.

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

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

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

By supporting HB 163, the Maryland General Assembly acknowledges that school communities need clear, research-informed guidelines to balance technology benefits with students' developmental and educational needs.

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

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

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

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

## **Conclusion**

HB 163 is a thoughtful step toward supporting learning environments that prioritize student engagement, mental health, and academic success. School counselors stand ready to support implementation by helping schools communicate expectations, engage families, and integrate healthy technology habits into counseling curricula.

For these reasons, MSCA urges a **favorable report** on HB 163. If you have any questions, please contact Jocelyn I. Collins at [jcollins@policypartners.net](mailto:jcollins@policypartners.net).