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BILL: House Bill 525
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
HEARING DATE: February 18, 2026
POSITION: UNFAVORABLE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State’s local boards of education, **opposes House Bill 525 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act).**

House Bill 755 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. HB 525 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, HB 525’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 HB 525. 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 **HB 525**.