

**Testimony in Favor with Amendments
House Bill 755 Phones Away for the School Day Act
Before the House Ways and Means Committee**

Chair, Vice Chair, and distinguished members of the Committee,

My name is The Honorable Dr. Cashenna A. Cross, Councilwoman at Large for the City of Glenarden, United States Air Force veteran, educator, and long standing advocate for youth development, public safety, and educational excellence. I respectfully submit this testimony in favor of House Bill 755 with amendments.

Throughout my career in public service, including training more than six thousand United States and international mid grade officers as a Master Instructor under the Air Education and Training Command, I have witnessed firsthand how discipline, focused learning environments, and clear expectations improve outcomes. Our young people deserve classrooms that prioritize learning, engagement, and healthy social development.

The growing presence of personal electronic devices during instructional hours has created measurable distractions that impact academic performance, classroom management, and student mental wellness. Teachers across Maryland consistently report lost instructional time, increased behavioral disruptions, and challenges maintaining student attention when unrestricted phone access exists during the school day.

At the same time, we must recognize that technology and artificial intelligence are now permanent parts of our learning environment. The question before us is not whether technology belongs in education, but how it is used responsibly. Artificial intelligence can expand access to knowledge, support individualized learning, and help students develop future ready skills. However, without boundaries, constant digital engagement can weaken focus, critical thinking, and interpersonal development.

This legislation creates an opportunity to restore balance. Students should learn when to engage technology intentionally and when to disconnect in order to think, collaborate, and lead. Education must remain human centered, guided by educators who teach judgment, ethics, and accountability alongside innovation. Responsible limits during instructional hours do not reject technology; they teach students how to use it wisely.

House Bill 755 takes an important step toward restoring that balance by establishing a statewide expectation that instructional time remains focused on learning. The bill appropriately recognizes medical needs and protections for students with Individualized Education Programs and Section 504 plans, ensuring that equity and accessibility remain central to implementation.

However, as a municipal leader and community advocate, I respectfully recommend several amendments to strengthen the bill and ensure successful implementation across diverse school systems.

Recommended Amendments:

First, provide flexibility for local boards of education to design implementation models that reflect community needs, school size, and available staffing resources, rather than a single uniform storage requirement.

Second, require clear parent communication standards so families understand how students may contact parents during emergencies and how schools will safeguard student devices.

Third, include guidance encouraging restorative and educational responses to violations rather than punitive discipline, reinforcing accountability while keeping students engaged in school.

Fourth, encourage annual reporting on implementation outcomes, including impacts on attendance, academic performance, and behavioral incidents, allowing the General Assembly to evaluate effectiveness using measurable data.

These amendments preserve the intent of the legislation while strengthening trust among parents, educators, and students.

Maryland has an opportunity to lead with a balanced approach that protects instructional time while preparing students to responsibly navigate an AI driven future. When classrooms are focused, students are safer, teachers are supported, and communities benefit.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 755 with amendments.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honorable Dr. Cashenna A. Cross Councilwoman at Large, City of Glenarden Municipal Advocate United States Air Force Veteran 571 719 8784