

**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
In Opposition of House Bill 525
County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy
Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**

February 18, 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 House Bill 525 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