



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

February 18, 2026

**Letter of Information**

The Arc Maryland is a statewide training, support, and advocacy organization that is dedicated to advancing and preserving the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

This bill would require a county board of education to develop and adopt a policy on the use of personal electronic devices during school hours, requiring the policy to restrict or limit the use of personal electronic devices by students during school hours except for any purpose documented in the student's education program or Section 504 plan, to monitor or address a student's health issue, or for certain educational purposes, and require the policy to be published on the county board's website and in student handbooks.

**Although this bill attempts to carve out an exception for students with disabilities, and this understanding is very much appreciated, we believe that carve-outs like this have the potential to do more damage than good: they amplify stigma and unconscious bias of students with disabilities that create obstacles to inclusion and belonging for students with disabilities.**

How? One way IEP and 504 teams work together to identify the least restrictive and best assistive technology options for students with disabilities is to identify devices and tech that students are already using, in and outside of the education environment. When students use existing technology such as smart phones as their communication devices, productivity or reading apps, checklists, timers, and more, they often feel more comfortable utilizing their accommodations and assistive technology to effectively access their education program.

If school systems restrict cell phone use for students without disabilities and only allow use for students with disabilities, this could increase the stigma students with disabilities can encounter when they are treated differently, and could jeopardize the confidentiality of a disabling condition that a student with a disability has a right to rely on.