

Written Witness Testimony on Delegate Wu's Bill HB0163

Bill: County Boards of Education - Student Technology Use Policy - Requirements

Witness Name: Alana Lerner

My name is Alana Lerner, and I am a Montgomery County mom of 3 young children. I am a parent supporter of Distraction-Free Schools Maryland. And I am a proud third-generation educator with experience as a high school science teacher, after school program leader, and career readiness instructor.

I would like to testify on Delegate Wu's Bill HB0163 regarding student technology in school. I thank the Delegate for his leadership in proposing this important bill. However, I would urge the Committee to make two important amendments:

1. The bill must extend the full prohibition of devices to High School students.
2. The bill must provide specific details for device storage during the entire school day that make them inaccessible to students, with limited exceptions.

I have spent my career mentoring high school age students and young adults. In the last 10 years, it is increasingly challenging to sustain my students' attention. Put simply, I cannot compete against the dopamine hit that phones provide. A recent study found that teens spend an average of 70 minutes each day on their phones – that translates to 30 school days per year spent on their phone. Additionally, it takes 20 minutes to refocus on learning after a device disruption. High schoolers cannot be left behind in this bill.

Device storage language in the bill is imperative. Without a storage requirement, policy enforcement will unfairly fall to teachers, leading to inconsistency or non-enforcement. During my time in the classroom, I dreaded spotting a student with their phone out in class. In that moment, the burden fell on me to enforce a policy and derail my lesson to address it. Teachers shouldn't have to waste precious instructional time to engage in conflict regarding phones.

Thank you for the important work that Delegate Wu and this Committee is doing to ensure our schools are places of focused learning and hubs of social-emotional development.