

April 1, 2026

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill (SB) 928- Maryland Phone Free Schools Act - Letter of Support

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Governor's Office for Children (the Office) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill 928 - Maryland Phone Free Schools Act, as amended. SB 928 would require each county board of education to develop and implement, not later than the 2027-2028 school year, a policy limiting the use of certain electronic communication devices by a student during the academic school day.

Research indicates that the use of cell phones has a negative impact on students' academic performance, mental health, and social development. Over 40% of public schools across the nation report that unauthorized device use moderately or severely disrupts learning.¹ The Office appreciates that this bill prioritizes academic engagement and limits distractions within schools and classrooms.

In addition, many students' social media use is linked to increased anxiety and depression.² Cell phones can be used for cyberbullying, which nine in ten public schools report experiencing. Excessive cell phone use is associated with loneliness and can deter students from socializing and building relationships with their peers.³

About 30 states and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws or policies that establish a base level of limitation on student cell phone use in K-12 schools. Research indicates that "bell to bell" restrictions where phones are prohibited during the school day hours can reduce⁴ unexcused absences and provide the most comprehensive⁵ environment for focus and social interaction compared to instructional-time only bans. In a January 2026 survey, Brookings found that 90% of adults and nearly 80% of teens support restrictions on cell phone use in school.⁶

¹<https://nces.ed.gov/learn/press-release/more-half-public-school-leaders-say-cell-phones-hurt-academic-performance>

²<https://www.kff.org/affordable-care-act/a-look-at-state-efforts-to-ban-cellphones-in-schools-and-implications-for-youth-mental-health/>

³See footnote 1

⁴ <https://edworkingpapers.com/ai25-1315>

⁵ <https://www.future-ed.org/qa-angela-duckworth-on-effective-school-cell-phone-policies/>

⁶<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/survey-parents-and-teens-support-school-cellphone-bans-and-most-dont-perceive-major-downsides/>

Studies also suggest that disciplinary guidelines are most effective when they are tiered and follow progressive discipline protocols, including parent/guardian communication and intervention, rather than relying solely on exclusionary discipline.⁷

The Governor's Office for Children strongly supports SB 928 and urges a favorable report. Thank you for your consideration.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Andrea Barnes, Policy Advisor and Manager of Legislative Affairs at andrea.barnes@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Carmel Martin,
Special Secretary, Governor's Office for Children and Senior Advisor to the Governor for Policy

⁷ <https://edworkingpapers.com/policy-practice-series/ai25-1315>