



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy **Vision:** Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 525
County Boards of Education - Student Cellular Phone Use Policy - Establishment
(Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
Committee: Ways and Means
By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdpHA)
Hearing Date: February 18, 2026

Chair Jheanelle Wilkins, Vice-Chair Jessica Feldmark, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB 525, which would require county boards of education to establish clear, consistent policies limiting student cellular phone use during the school day.

Excessive phone use in schools has been shown to contribute to distractions, reduced academic engagement, and increased stress and anxiety among students. By setting reasonable boundaries around phone use, this bill promotes learning-focused environments that allow students to be more present, attentive, socially connected during the school day, and have improved test scores.^{1, 2} Data from the Pew Research shows that " 72% of U.S. high school teachers say cellphone distraction is a major problem in the classroom".³

Several U.S. states have introduced Phone-Free School Acts, largely targeting the restriction of smartphones and, in some cases, smartwatches during the school day to boost focus and mental health. California's AB 3216 requires districts to limit or prohibit phone use by July 1, 2026, while other states like Florida, Texas, and South Carolina have implemented similar measures.^{4, 5}

¹ Huey M, Giguere D. The Impact of Smartphone Use on Course Comprehension and Psychological Well-Being in the College Classroom. *Innov High Educ.* 2023;48(3):527-537. doi: 10.1007/s10755-022-09638-1. Epub 2022 Nov 18. PMID: 36440453; PMCID: PMC9676861.

² Ma, W., Lin, X., Lou, J., Liu, Y., Tang, W., & Bao, Z. (2023). The impact of students' cellphone-use and self-control on academic performance in traditional classroom. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 24(4), 591–598. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-023-09824-6>

³ Hatfield, J. (2024, June 12). 72% of U.S. high school teachers say cellphone distraction is a major problem in the classroom. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/12/72-percent-of-us-high-school-teachers-say-cellphone-distraction-is-a-major-problem-in-the-classroom/>

⁴ kffsashaz. (2024, September 5). *A look at state efforts to ban cellphones in schools and implications for youth mental health*. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/a-look-at-state-efforts-to-ban-cellphones-in-schools-and-implications-for-youth-mental-health/>

⁵ National Conference of State Legislators. Hold the Phone: Recent State Activity on Cell Use in Schools. (October 29, 2024). Retrieved on February 10, 2026 from <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/hold-the-phone-recent-state-activity-on-cell-use-in-schools#:~:text=Some%20states%20that%20have%20enacted%20legislation%20include%20personal%20devices%20during%20the%20school%20day>

Importantly, this legislation balances academic and developmental benefits with student safety and individual needs. The bill explicitly protects a student's right to use a cellular phone when required by an individualized education program, to manage documented health conditions, during emergency situations, or when directed by educators for instructional purposes, to access language translation tools, or to meet caregiving duties. These safeguards ensure that phone-use policies are implemented equitably and flexibly, without undermining accessibility, student well-being, or educational innovation.

Finally, requiring statewide implementation by the 2027–2028 school year provides school systems with adequate time to engage stakeholders, develop thoughtful policies, and communicate expectations to students and families. Establishing consistent standards across counties will reduce confusion, support educators in classroom management, and reinforce a shared commitment to student success.

For these reasons, we urge favorable consideration of this bill (HB525) as a meaningful step toward improving educational outcomes and student well-being across Maryland schools.

Thank you.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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