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BILL: SB 928

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

DATE: April 1, 2026

POSITION: Unfavorable

COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **opposes** Senate Bill 928.

This bill requires each local board of education to develop and implement a policy to prohibit the use of cellular phones by students during the academic school day, which is defined as any time during the school day, including a student's lunch, recess, or passing period. The policy must also require students to store their phones in a secure place during instructional time and prohibit a student from accessing or using social media applications and websites during school hours. The policy may not prohibit a student from using a phone (1) for any purpose documented in the student's individualized education program or Section 504 Plan; (2) to monitor or address a student's documented health issue; (3) to access language translation tools when a school-issued device is not available; or (4) for the purpose of meeting caregiving responsibilities, as approved by the principal. The policy must also establish administrator-enforced tiered disciplinary measures for violations, excluding suspension or expulsion solely for violating the policy.

Maryland superintendents appreciate the good intentions of this bill; however, PSSAM steadfastly opposes this one-size-fits-all legislation, especially on a difficult issue that has been thoughtfully deliberated at the local level with boards, staff, students, families, and communities.

Most school systems have been implementing cell phone usage policies successfully for nearly two years. These locally developed policies reflect extensive stakeholder engagement and consensus-building. While there have been operational challenges, districts have worked through them and refined their approaches based on real-world experience.

In the past several years, superintendents, school boards, and advisory groups in all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have taken proactive action to establish, update, or study district-wide cell phone policies. These efforts include establishing new policies, updating board policies, revising codes of conduct or student handbooks, and introducing pilot programs. Much of this work was informed by surveys of parents, teachers, and students, as well as extensive public meetings.

In addition, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) convened a broad workgroup of stakeholders in 2025, including several superintendents, to study this issue. We strongly supported this workgroup and its on-the-ground membership. The workgroup anchored its recommendations in national research and partnered with Phones in Focus, which has initiated a national study based on educator input regarding best practices across the country. Most importantly, the workgroup incorporated the experiences of local school systems that have already engaged deeply with their communities to determine appropriate use of cell phones and “smart technology” in schools.

While this bill reflects many of these best practices, it does not fully account for the operational challenges districts have already encountered and worked through. Providing local school systems with greater opportunity to share these lessons learned and inform the final policy framework would have been greatly appreciated. ***As drafted, the bill does not provide sufficient flexibility for school systems; many districts may need to significantly change their policies and procedures—just as existing, consensus-based policies are being implemented.***

We are also concerned about the bill’s interaction with existing local codes of conduct and disciplinary authority. For example, it is unclear how this policy would intersect with broader disciplinary frameworks when multiple violations occur. This creates ambiguity for administrators and raises concerns about potential unintended interference with disciplinary practices - an area traditionally governed at the local level.

We appreciate the Legislature’s continued attention to this important issue and agree with the overall intent of supporting focused learning environments for students. However, we believe there are unintended operational challenges that should be more carefully considered. If the Legislature remains open to hearing from school systems about their experiences and lessons learned over the past two years, we would greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute to a more workable and flexible approach.

PSSAM remains committed to empowering local decision-making to ensure education policies that are relevant, flexible, and reflective of the unique needs of each community.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** Senate Bill 928 and respectfully requests an **unfavorable** report.