

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony: Favorable

Submitted By: Alana Lerner

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

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, joining over 1,000 other Maryland parents eager for phone-free schools. I am also a third-generation educator – I taught high school biology during my time in the Teach for America corps and for the last 8 years, I have taught career readiness skills to young adults in the workforce development program, Year Up United.

I am grateful to all of the bill's sponsors and co-sponsors for their championing of this critical legislation. However, I am concerned that there may be a discussion to change the bill to a form that will dilute its impact in keeping our kids safe from this addictive, harmful technology during the school day.

Therefore, I am writing to ask you to:

- 1) **Support the Senate version of this bill as is, in its current form.** Please **do not** change this bill to conform to House Bill 525 which allows for an instructional use exception for phones in schools.

This bill is being heard during a time of national and historic accountability for social media companies. Just last week, Meta was found guilty and ordered to pay \$375 million to the state of New Mexico for misleading users about the safety of its platforms and enabling the sexual exploitation of young users. Just a few days later in California, a monumental decision was made by a jury that Meta and Youtube were addictive and led to mental health distress of a young user. To date, school districts, state attorneys general, and individuals have filed thousands of lawsuits accusing Meta, Snap, TikTok and YouTube of harming young users.¹ Through a strong phone-free schools bill, Maryland has the opportunity to leverage this moment to ensure that schools remain havens free from this dangerous technology.

It is not safe to create an environment on school grounds where students will be able to have their phones out for instructional use and get an “addictive hit” while in the classroom. If we know that students are using phones for social media use, then asking them to take out phones for instructional purposes during class introduces tremendous liability for harm during school hours.

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Tan, Eli. “Meta Ordered to Pay \$375 Million Over Child Safety Violations.” *The New York Times*, 24 March 2026,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/24/technology/meta-new-mexico-child-safety-violations.html>. Accessed 29 March 2026.

Additionally, allowing an exception for phones for instructional use will create immense inequity in classrooms. Picture this: a teacher plans a lesson that requires students to use the camera on their phone to observe and document science experiment results in real time. However, 5 students in that class do not have a phone and therefore cannot fully participate in this lesson's activity. Imagine the consequence of creating a "haves" and "have nots" dynamic in the classroom and the ripple effects that will have on those students' social-emotional wellbeing. Imagine the learning loss for those 5 students who aren't able to fully take part in an educational experience at school due to not having a phone. I urge you to consider the inequity inherent in this exception clause of the bill.

You may be thinking...well, couldn't there be an alternative tool for students without phones to use for the lesson mentioned above? Couldn't they use a digital camera or use a notebook to sketch a drawing of what they observed in the experiment? Absolutely, that alternative is certainly possible. Therefore, if that is the case, then the alternative tool *should be the default instrument for the lesson*. If we agree that phones are harmful, distracting, and addictive, then why would we ever rely on them as instructional tools when alternatives exist?

Separate from the instructional use exception debate, I want to take this opportunity to discuss the issue of storage in both Senate and House bills. I want to share my perspective, drawing on my 15+ years as an educator. In an ideal world, both bills would **restore the original definition of "store"** such that devices are not carried on the students' person during the entire instructional school day.

Without a storage requirement that is off the students' person, the 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.

I encourage you to consider these points when discussing the language of SB928 in your committee hearing. Thank you for your leadership to protect our kids and keep schools focused on learning.