



HB0525 – COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – STUDENT ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE USE POLICY – ESTABLISHMENT (MARYLAND PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS ACT)

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WAYS AND MEANS

OPPOSE

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB0525 – County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)**. This bill requires that no later than the 2027-2028 school year, each county board develop and implement a policy to limit the use of electronic communication devices by students during the academic school day. Such a policy is required to: (1) prohibit a student from using an electronic communication device during the academic school day; (2) require a student to secure, in a manner determined by the county board, the student's electronic communication device during the academic day; (3) prohibit a student from using the social media applications and social media websites determined by the county board during the academic school day; and (4) require administrator approval for the use of a personal electronic communication device for educational purposes when a school-issued electronic device is unavailable. The policy developed by the county board must also permit a student to use an electronic communication device: (1) for any purpose documented in the student's individualized education plan or 504 plan; (2) to monitor or address a student's documented health issue; (3) during an emergency event, if expressly authorized by an administrator; (4) when directed by an administrator for educational purposes; (5) to access language translation tools to ensure educational equity for multilingual students when school-issued communication devices are not available or sufficient; or (6) for the purpose of meeting caregiving responsibilities, as approved by a principal. Additionally, the policy developed by the county board is required to include tiered disciplinary measures, not to include suspension or expulsion.

Furthermore, on or before September 1, 2027, and annually thereafter, each county board is required to report to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) on the impacts of the implementation of the policy, including: (1) a copy of the current electronic device policy; (2) documentation of stakeholder engagement; (3) compliance and enforcement data, including related disciplinary referrals disaggregated by student demographic subgroup and the use of restorative practices as a disciplinary measure; (4) description of the impacts on the school environment; (5) equity and accommodation data, including the number and type of exemption to the policy granted by a school; and (6) anticipated policy revisions for the upcoming school year. Finally, on or before July 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, MSDE is required to publish on the department's website a report that compiles and summarizes the reports of the county boards on the implementing electronic communication policies, including data submitted by the county boards, enforcement challenges, and technical assistance and model policies.

AACPS opposes this bill which would infringe upon local control of educational policy regarding student use of cell phones. Local governance by boards of education is essential to a comprehensive system of public education. Retaining local board authority allows for collaboration and cooperative planning within the local community rather than through top-down decisions from the State. In fact, Section 4-101 of the Education Law Article states, "educational matters that affect the counties shall be under the control of a county board of education," and that local boards of education, "determine, with the advice of the county Superintendent, the educational policies of the county school system." Local boards of education receive and rely on public input to best address local needs. The relationship between the community and local public schools encourages participation by parents/guardians and other community members in the educational process so that everyone has responsibility for and ownership of public

education. Retaining decision-making authority at the local level allows local boards of education to best balance educational practices, available resources to implement those practices, public input, and accountability.

Furthermore, the Board of Education of Anne Arundel County and the Superintendent have already adopted a policy and regulation governing student use of cell phones, Policy JCO and Regulation JCO-RA – Use of Personal Electronic Communication devices by Students. In addition to this policy and regulation, AACPS has adopted student cell phone guidelines which further restrict student cell phone use.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB0525.