

SB928 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)
Written Testimony (Favorable With Amendment)
Submitted By: Sarah Weber, March 30, 2026

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Sarah Weber, and I am a parent of two children, grades 3 and 7, in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS). Since the pandemic I have grown increasingly concerned about the ways we are using technology in schools, both intentionally and unintentionally, that can have negative unintended consequences. Since 2024 I have been advocating with PGCPS to put measures in place to restrict student cell phone use during the school day.

I'm very grateful to see the State of Maryland finally taking a hard look at the issue of student cell phone use in schools, and I'm submitting testimony today to express support for SB928 (the Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act).

This legislation is long overdue. Numerous studies indicate that children, due to their developing brains, often struggle with self-regulation and impulse control. Once phones are allowed or expected for school purposes, it is impossible to ensure they won't be used for other purposes, such as playing games, texting, social media, etc. Research highlights that the constant presence of mobile phones can lead to distractions, hinder academic performance, and contribute to poor mental health and depression. Teachers already face numerous challenges in managing their classrooms. Introducing a comprehensive policy to restrict mobile phone use could alleviate some of their burdens, allowing teachers to concentrate more on teaching rather than policing phone usage.

Unfortunately, the current version of this bill has struck important language that would require that student personal communication devices be kept away from the student during the school day, which defeats a large part of the purpose of this bill. My son's middle school already uses a "no show" policy where devices are to be off but still may be kept with students during the day. Despite this, students find ways to make use of their phones through surreptitious use during class and with frequent bathroom breaks. In this scenario, teachers are still in the position of serving as phone police, and students still find ways to access their phones.

The current version also includes language that allows for exceptions for instructional purposes. This is unnecessary and will remove teeth from the bill. Once a teacher requests students to use their personal devices for an instructional purpose, how are they prevented from using the device for social media, games, and more? What about the students who don't have phones? This exception creates a de facto requirement for students to have personal cell phones at school, in the name of academic necessity.

Schools should make use of the existing technology for instructional purposes and not request or require students to use a personal cell phone in the name of learning.

Please pass this bill, with the following amendments:

1. **Keep the Senate version that strikes out the instructional use exception entirely** (page 3, lines 18-19).
2. **Restore the original definition of "store"** (page 2, lines 24-26) so that devices are not carried on the student during the school day.

Maryland owes it to its students to get out ahead on this issue and help reduce kids' exposure to addictive devices while in school. The evidence is loud and clear at this point, and now is the time to act.