
HB0525 – County Boards of Education – Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy – Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted by: James Frank, Middle School Parent

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is James Frank. I am the parent of two children, ages 11 and 12, who attend Catonsville Middle School.

Thank you to Delegate Boafo and co-sponsors Wolek, Kaufman, Moreno, Schindler, Solomon, and Taylor for bringing forward HB0525. I understand that Delegate Boafo intends to amend the bill to remove exceptions for emergency use and to ensure devices are inaccessible during the instructional day. I strongly support that direction.

Students simply do not need personal electronic devices during the school day. Previous generations—including many of you—did not carry devices to contact parents during elementary or middle school. Families relied on school staff to communicate when necessary, and students worked with trusted adults to access an office phone if needed. That structure reinforced trust between families and schools and encouraged students to develop resilience and problem-solving skills.

When children immediately turn to a personal device during moments of stress, they lose opportunities to practice independence and self-regulation. I operate a summer camp where children have no access to digital devices. When challenges arise, they communicate directly with peers and supervising adults. Parents are contacted when appropriate by staff. This model builds trust, maturity, and interpersonal competence—skills that are undermined when children have constant direct digital access.

I am also a lifelong educator. I began teaching with Baltimore County Public Schools in the early 2000s. At that time, computers were used intentionally and sparingly. Laptops were stored on a locked rolling cart and distributed for specific, teacher-guided projects. Software restrictions were strong and purposeful.

Post-COVID, the landscape changed dramatically. In kindergarten, my sons were placed on laptops at home for virtual learning. We were relieved when in-person school resumed so they could rebuild interpersonal skills. However, routine laptop use continued both in school and at home, including summer expectations to bring devices home.

At home, much of that use was not academic. Students shared ways to access games on unblocked sites. In fourth grade, my sons and their classmates challenged themselves

during class to disable teacher monitoring software. Earlier this year, in sixth grade, their grades fell from As and Bs to Ds and Es. We later learned that monitoring software had been removed from school-issued laptops, and instructional time was being diverted to YouTube and games. After we requested reports through the administration and had their laptops removed, they returned to paper-based work and finished the quarter with As and Bs.

I share this not to criticize educators, but to illustrate how difficult it is to manage unrestricted digital access in a school environment. If school-issued devices create these challenges, personal cell phones present even greater risks.

I fully support HB0525 and urge you to pass it. Maryland's students deserve school environments focused on learning, attention, and healthy development.

Thank you for your time and consideration.