

**Christine McComas Testimony HB 0525 Hearing, February 18, 2026**  
**Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act**

**HB 525 (Del. Boaf, et al) - Favorable**

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldman and committee members,

My name is Christine McComas and I am the mother of Grace McComas for whom **Maryland's Grace's Law (2013 & Grace's Law 2.0, 2019)** against cyberbullying is named. We lost our joyful and kind-hearted Grace to suicide on Easter Sunday of 2012 at the dawn of smartphones and social media availability. Indeed, for many it's difficult to imagine or even recall a time before the instant communication and relentless noise that digital technologies have brought into our lives.

The death-wishing, hateful cyber abuse aimed at our young teen was shocking in and of itself, but at the time no one understood the invasive and pervasive nature of cyberbullying, that allowed instantaneous and far reaching amplification of damaging abuse, making it inescapable. The research now shows that cyberbullying is an independent risk factor for depression and suicidality and the trajectory of smartphone adoption tracks with the alarming decline in child mental health and lowered cognitive ability.

(I *highly* recommend watching the short intro statements of the panel experts that spoke at this U.S. Senate hearing I attended in January entitled "[Plugged Out: Examining the Impact of Technology on America's Youth](#)", which starts at 32:32.)

**We are now in the midst of a serious public health crisis and for the safety and wellbeing of our children, these electronic devices should not be accessible during the school day.**

Since Grace's death I have advocated for social media reform at the state (**MD Kids Code, 2024**) and federal level (**Kids Online Safety Act**, pending), [advocating with other bereaved parents](#) who have lost children to varied harms, but all connected to social media and personal communication devices.

Not unlike Big Tobacco, we now know that Big Tech intentionally uses manipulative, addictive design to encourage compulsive use in order to collect data (upper tens of millions of data points on a child by age 13), which is then sold for \$BILLIONS in ad revenue aimed at our children, even as *they know* they are harming and sometimes killing them. We advocate on Capitol Hill with corporate whistleblowers and I was in Los Angeles last week and [stood vigil as the first landmark social media trials have begun](#).

Over the years families have reached out for help through [Grace McComas Memorial](#).

These are REAL, Maryland families in crisis, and smartphones were used, including during school hours, to harass and harm- sometimes criminally.

~ A Maryland woman testified in 2018 for Grace's Law 2.0 in honor and memory of her teen nephew, who died by suicide after another student videotaped him in the school's bathroom and posted the video to social media. From the moment the video was posted, Matthew was mercilessly bullied, harassed and teased by students who had seen the video.

~ Also in 2018, 12-year old girls reached out for help as they were being hounded by their male classmates for nude photos and cyberbullied mercilessly when they said 'no' and reported the sexual harassment to school authorities (who initially did not protect them), resulting in mental distress and self-harm. One of the girls gave testimony.

~ A child with an i.e.p. for depression and anxiety had a nervous breakdown in school, which was filmed and shared online, going viral, resulting in in-person bullying and ridicule in school, on the bus, at sports practice and in the neighborhood.

Finally, new and unregulated AI is a serious threat to our children.

~ The most chilling call for help came from a Maryland mom who had been contacted by the MD Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (MSP), who had been tipped off by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), that her child was on XXX p\*rn websites.

**Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) was made by using AI- taking her head from a family vacation photo as a pre-teen and attaching it to the body of another person, featured on the outside of the XXX p\*rn site saying "Undress me with AI". Horrible enough, but even worse, some of the men paying to use the website were also paying to supposedly 'interact' with her fake persona in lewd chatrooms. *One of those men used reverse facial recognition to find her in real life and was trying to contact her- leading to severe anxiety and fear, risking her safety and mental health. It ended up that it was a high school classmate who was spoofing multiple girls and \* he was using his phone during school hours to do so.\****

(Grace's Law should have given this young man a meaningful correction, but local police did not use it to charge him for unknown reasons). Thankfully, just last year, **the Deep Fake AI portion of SB 360- sponsored by my Senator Hester** was passed to help provide some relief, but more must be done.

Maryland has been at the forefront nationally in passing laws protecting child privacy, well-being and safety, and the swift passage of HB 525, Phone-Free Schools Act is the next needed step

Thank you for your consideration.

Christine McComas

# Grace McComas



Stats from Phone-Free Schools Administrator Toolkit:

**SINCE 2010**  
**134% ↑**  
Increase in anxiety  
**106% ↑**  
Increase in depression

*The Anxiety Research*

**41%**  
OF TEENS WITH THE HIGHEST SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE rate their overall mental health as poor or very poor  
*American Psychiatric Association*

Adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were more than  
**FOUR TIMES**  
as likely to report thoughts of  
**SUICIDE AND ATTEMPTS**  
as those who didn't  
*National Institutes of Health*



Each additional hour of total screen time increases the odds of suicidal behaviors  
*Science Direct*

**Youth reporting LONELINESS**  
are also more likely to  
**drop out of school at the age of 16**

*Loneliness Matters For School Years*

**95%**  
OF TEACHERS SAY ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IS A PROBLEM IN PUBLIC K-12 SCHOOLS  
*National Education Association*

**35%**  
of teens admit to using their cellphone to  
**CHEAT**  
*Common Sense Media*

**STEEP DROP IN BULLYING**  
**46%** & **43%**  
of girls & of boys  
experienced a reduction of bullying after smartphone bans were enacted.  
*Technology, Stem, Student Outcomes and Mental Health*

**87%**  
of teachers said bullying is a problem in Public K-12 schools

**34%**  
of middle school teachers call bullying a major problem  
*National Education Association*

**22%**  
of high school students have SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED SUICIDE IN THE PAST YEAR

**10%**  
HAVE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE IN THE PAST YEAR  
*CDC 2021*

**PORNOGRAPHY EXPOSURE**  
**1/3 OF ALL TEENS**  
reported that they have been exposed to pornography during the school day  
*Common Sense Media*

**"BRAIN DRAIN"**  
The mere presence of one's own smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity  
*Brain Dates*

# Research Infographic

**97%** <sup>I</sup>

**OF STUDENTS USE PHONES DURING SCHOOL**

An average of 43 minutes per day, spent primarily on social media, YouTube, and gaming

Common Sense Media

**SOCIAL MEDIA IS NEARLY UNIVERSAL**

**40%** of 8-12 year olds are on social media

**95%** of teenagers are on social media

Advisors on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

**TEENS SPEND NEARLY FIVE HOURS A DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA APPS**

American Psychological Association

**3+ HOURS**

**PER DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA** troubles the risk of poor mental health including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety

Advisors on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

NEA Poll

**83% OF TEACHERS** support an all day phone-free policy

National Education Association

**72%**

**OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS REPORT CELLPHONES ARE A MAJOR DISTRACTION IN THE CLASSROOM**

The Mere Presence of a Cell Phone May be a Distraction

**50%+** of kids get **237 NOTIFICATIONS PER DAY**

Some receive as many as

**4,500** EVERY DAY!

**23% occur during school**

Common Sense Media



**Phones prevent face to face communication**

Research suggests that face to face communications are linked to better mental health.

Psychology Today

**Students not using their phones during class wrote down 62% more information.**



They also scored a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple choice test

The Impact of Mobile Phones (Smartphones) on Student Learning

**RATES OF SCHOOL LONELINESS HAS DOUBLED SINCE 2012**

Worksite Increases in Adolescent Loneliness



1:29



5Guc



Business

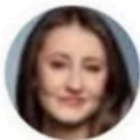
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By



Clare Duffy



