

**Testimony in Favor with Amendments
House Bill 525
County Boards of Education Student Electronic Communication
Device Use Policy Establishment
Maryland Phone Free Schools Act**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, My name is The Honorable Dr. Cashenna A. Cross. I offer this testimony in support of House Bill 525 with amendments grounded in practical classroom realities, student safety, and equitable implementation across Maryland school systems. Throughout my career as a United States Air Force veteran, a master instructor responsible for training more than six thousand United States and international mid grade officers, and as a municipal leader deeply engaged with families and youth development, I have seen firsthand the difference that focused learning environments make in shaping discipline, achievement, and long term opportunity. Structured environments matter. Expectations matter. And learning spaces free from constant digital interruption matter. House Bill 525 recognizes a growing concern shared by parents, educators, and community leaders. Unrestricted access to personal electronic communication devices during the academic school day has contributed to reduced classroom engagement, increased distraction, and heightened social pressures that follow students into spaces meant for learning and growth. Establishing consistent policies across county school systems is a reasonable and necessary step toward restoring attention to instruction while protecting student well being. The bill appropriately allows exemptions for individualized education programs, documented health needs, emergencies, language access, and caregiving responsibilities. These provisions demonstrate an understanding that student needs are not uniform and must be handled with care. However, I respectfully recommend several amendments to strengthen implementation and prevent unintended consequences. First, the legislation should require statewide guidance ensuring that enforcement practices do not disproportionately impact students from historically underserved communities. Reporting requirements exist, but proactive equity safeguards should be clearly articulated to avoid uneven disciplinary outcomes. Second, counties should be directed to include parent communication protocols during the school day so families maintain confidence that emergency contact pathways remain accessible even when devices are stored. Third, the State Department of Education should develop model storage and security standards to prevent loss, theft, or liability disputes related to student devices. Local systems should not bear inconsistent operational burdens when statewide best practices can be established. Fourth, implementation should include educator and student training focused on digital responsibility and healthy technology habits. Limitation alone does not teach responsible use. Education must accompany policy. House Bill 525 moves Maryland toward a healthier academic environment where attention, safety, and instructional time are prioritized. With thoughtful amendments that reinforce equity, clarity, and operational consistency, this legislation can support both academic excellence and student dignity. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report with amendments. Respectfully submitted, The Honorable Dr. Cashenna A. Cross Councilwoman at Large, City of Glenarden Municipal Advocate 571 719 8784