

February 18, 2026

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill (HB) 0525 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act)

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Governor's Office for Children (the Office) respectfully submits this letter of information for House Bill 0525 - County Boards of Education - Student Electronic Communication Device Use Policy - Establishment (Maryland Phone-Free Schools Act). HB 0525 would require each county board of education to develop and implement, not later than the 2027-2028 school year, a policy limiting the use of certain electronic communication devices by a student during the academic school day.

Research indicates that the use of cell phones has a negative impact on students' academic performance, mental health, and social development. Over 40% of public schools across the nation report that unauthorized device use moderately or severely disrupts learning.¹ The Office appreciates that this bill prioritizes academic engagement and limits distractions within schools and classrooms.

In addition, many students' social media use is linked to increased anxiety and depression.² Cell phones can be used for cyberbullying, which nine in ten public schools report experiencing. Excessive cell phone use is associated with loneliness and can deter students from socializing and building relationships with their peers.³

About 30 states and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws or policies that establish a base level of limitation on student cell phone use in K-12 schools. Research indicates that "bell to bell" restrictions where phones are prohibited during the school day hours can reduce⁴ unexcused absences and provide the most comprehensive⁵ environment for focus and social interaction

¹<https://nces.ed.gov/learn/press-release/more-half-public-school-leaders-say-cell-phones-hurt-academic-performance>

²<https://www.kff.org/affordable-care-act/a-look-at-state-efforts-to-ban-cellphones-in-schools-and-implications-for-youth-mental-health/>

³See footnote 1

⁴ <https://edworkingpapers.com/ai25-1315>

⁵ <https://www.future-ed.org/ga-angela-duckworth-on-effective-school-cell-phone-policies/>



compared to instructional-time only bans. In a January 2026 survey, Brookings found that 90% of adults and nearly 80% of teens support restrictions on cell phone use in school.⁶

Studies also suggest that disciplinary guidelines are most effective when they are tiered and follow progressive discipline protocols, including parent/guardian communication and intervention, rather than relying solely on exclusionary discipline.⁷

The Governor's Office for Children requests that the committee consider this information on school day device prohibitions and tiered discipline protocols as it deliberates this and other related legislation regarding personal electronic devices in schools. Thank you for your consideration.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Andrea Barnes, Policy Advisor and Manager of Legislative Affairs at andrea.barnes@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Carmel Martin,
Special Secretary, Governor's Office for Children and Senior Advisor to the Governor for Policy

⁶<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/survey-parents-and-teens-support-school-cellphone-bans-and-most-dont-perceive-major-downsides/>

⁷ <https://edworkingpapers.com/policy-practice-series/ai25-1315>