

Monique Rafuse
Falmouth
LD 1234

4/14/25

To the Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

I am writing to you today in SUPPORT of LD's 170 & 1234.

I am both a licensed educator and a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) here in the state of Maine with three decades of experience with youth in several different settings. I am also an owner/director of an overnight summer camp in which cell phones are not permitted at camp for our campers.

Through my current work as an LCPC in the high school setting, through my private practice, and with years prior including work in both middle and high schools, what is abundantly clear is that the use of student-owned cell phones have no place in schools from bell to bell.

There are a multitude of reasons that I could name, with the most obvious being that phones serve to distract from the natural connections that should be built around the face-to-face community of a school setting. We desperately need students to feel connection to others, in a world post-Covid, and to experience pro-social interactions - cell phones actively detract from this goal. Lost in constant texts and emojis are important social cues, facial expressions, and tone that directs conversation, and gives meaning and context without the need for interpretation.

Secondly, cell phones in schools are a way for parents to "check on" their kids unnecessarily, actively preventing independence in their kids and increasing anxiety. Parents can intervene in day-to-day matters like grades too easily – robbing students of opportunities to exercise independence and self-advocacy and driving teachers away from teaching; parents are also frequently informing students of sensitive news from home without the school even knowing – leaving staff to pick up the pieces; and otherwise unintentionally creating barriers for learning at school. The students' job at school is to engage in learning and parents' job is to trust the caring adults at school who are with them. Again, distractions of cell phones are unwelcome.

Additionally, it should be noted that cell phones play an integral role in behavioral incidents at school including bullying, bathroom video recordings, intimate hookups, in school substance use and exchanges, and pre-arranged physical altercations and acts of aggression. We know that cell phones are essential to the photos and short videos that end up on "Snap" or "Insta" within seconds, and I've seen all these behaviors sabotage even the best and brightest students in the schools. On average, at any one time approximately half of the students referred to me for in-school counseling are referred for incidents that involve cell phone use. I've worked in some of the most privileged districts in Maine, and some of the most challenged. Cell phones know no boundaries no matter how hard schools, well-meaning administrators, and overworked teachers try to impose limits that fall short of an outright prohibition.

The very best solution is to take a strong stance on a bell-to-bell phone-free school policy. You should anticipate some parents, and surely some students will not be happy upon early days of implementation. But many parents and kids aren't happy with things as they are, and this is one move in the right direction toward positive change for our schools.

As such I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on the bills prohibiting cellphones in Maine schools.

Best Regards,

Monique Rafuse, LCPC