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LD 1234

Dear Maine Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

Thank you for your dedication to policies that support our students' well-being. I am writing in support of LD 1234: An Act to Ban Cellular Telephones from Public School Classrooms.

As both a doctor and a scientist, I have strived in my career to understand and improve the many factors that influence people's health and development. One area that has become increasingly clear—both in the research and in real-world experience—is the powerful impact of smartphones on young people.

We are now seeing strong evidence that restricting phone use in schools, particularly through bell-to-bell bans, has meaningful benefits. These benefits are not just theoretical or anecdotal—they are measurable and consistent across diverse school environments. When phones are removed from the learning space, we see a notable improvement in social interactions. Students talk to each other more. They make eye contact. They engage more deeply with their peers and with their teachers.

From a mental health perspective, this shift is especially important. We know that constant access to social media, messaging apps, and notifications can increase anxiety and feelings of isolation. By reducing screen time during school hours, we give students a much-needed break from that digital pressure. This allows them to be more present, more focused, and ultimately more at ease.

Schools that have implemented comprehensive phone restrictions report fewer classroom disruptions. Teachers are able to teach without constantly competing for students' attention. Students are better able to concentrate, which improves not only academic outcomes but also classroom dynamics. The environment becomes more respectful, more collaborative, and more conducive to learning.

Just as importantly, we see stronger peer relationships forming. When students aren't glued to their screens, they reconnect with one another. They build friendships based on real, face-to-face interactions—something that is essential for emotional growth and resilience.

All of these outcomes—better focus, stronger relationships, improved mental health, and a more positive school culture—point to one thing: restricting phone use during the school day is a step toward healthier, more connected, and more successful students.

These are benefits we simply cannot afford to overlook—especially at a time when test scores in Maine lag behind much of the country, and when youth mental health is under increasing strain. We have a responsibility to be proactive about the environments we create for our children. This isn't about punishing students or denying them access to technology. It's about ensuring that school remains a place where they can thrive—academically, socially, and emotionally—free from the constant pull of digital distractions.

Thank you,
Dr Kristen Scopaz, MD and parent of 2