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LD 1234

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Good morning Senators, Representatives, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Emilie Throckmorton, and I have been a public high school English teacher in Bangor, Maine for 25 years. After trying to teach while managing cell phones over the past few school years, I can absolutely assure you phones no longer belong in our kids' hands, backpacks, or pockets during instructional time. With the rise of cell phone and social media addiction in our teenagers, we've reached a tipping point. My experiences match what the research tells us about how very distracting and damaging cell phones are for students in school. Now that we know better, we need to do better.

In my classes, I have a no-phones rule, which is supported by my school's expectation – but I spend so much time and energy managing this expectation, it inhibits my ability to give full attention to my teaching. Unfortunately, phones are not “out of sight, out of mind,” so long as students can still feel them buzzing with notifications. Many students are leaving for the bathroom to check their phones, or hiding phones behind books and laptops, and some students are so quick to default back to their phones that I cannot look away from them for one minute. Students are messaging each other on social media all day long instead of paying attention to classes. If and when there is a fight at school, a circle of students with phones out emerges, and the fight is shared throughout the student population within minutes, encouraging a culture of violence. I am a seasoned teacher who has a good rapport with my students, and I still find myself arguing about and policing phones constantly. Students, in my observation, seem emboldened about their phones and have come to believe that they cannot function without having them close by. Simply saying that teachers need to be better at enforcing the rules completely undermines the strength of the phone addiction that is occurring in our schools. Teachers need help from stricter policies around phones, and a state-wide ban would give immense support to teachers who are at their wit's end.

As parents and professionals, we often make hard decisions to set up our kids for success. Students won't like having limited access to their phones, but adults in schools must take action in the same way that they decide many other things in the best interest of kids – school safety rules, curriculum and assessment decisions, lunch nutrition options. Simply put, we are harming our students by allowing them access to their phones while they are attempting to focus and listen. Some people say we are not preparing our kids for a world where cell phones will be ever present. I say instead, let us show our kids the power of giving our attention to our classes, teachers, and friends at school. Let them have the experience of putting their phones away. Many of them won't make this choice on their own, so we have to make it for them.

To be clear, I am not blaming the students; these phones were designed to demand kids' full attention. In my experience, phones have the most detrimental impact on our most vulnerable students, both emotionally and academically. Imagine how much student attention spans and social skills would increase and anxieties would decrease, if their focus were to be simply in the classroom, in the moment, at school.

I fully understand why some parents are wary of limiting access to phones. We live in a world where we have constant and immediate access to one another, and parents like to check in with their children. My youngest is a high school student. While I enjoy being able to reach him during the school day, knowing what I know as a teacher – I would give that up for his sake. I believe that if any parent were to sit in a classroom and watch how distracting cell phones are, they would be on board with restricting use. All classrooms and school offices have phones that are available for

urgent needs or calls home, and every student does not need their own device just in case of emergency.

I am confident that keeping phones away from kids during instructional time would have immediate benefits in academic success, engagement, and socialization. We owe it to our students to prioritize their wellbeing and insist on phone-free learning.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Committee to vote unanimously to pass LD 170 and LD 1234. Thank you for your time and please feel free to follow up with questions.