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Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Campbell, and members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee,

Hi, my name is Christian Perry, and I've had the privilege of serving as an educator at King Middle School for the past 20 years. Prior to that, I worked as a social worker for over a decade. Currently, I serve as the Culture and Climate Coordinator, where I work closely with our assistant principal to support student behavior and ensure that school-wide expectations are consistently upheld. My role is centered around fostering a culture of learning and safety—creating an environment where students feel supported and are able to succeed. However, one of the most persistent challenges we've faced this year is the issue of student phone usage.

At King Middle School, we've made a committed effort to enforce a clear "Off and Away" phone policy. From the start, our goal has been to minimize distractions and create an environment where learning is the top priority. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, phone usage among students continues to be a persistent and disruptive issue.

The most common infractions involve students pulling their phones out during class time, frequently asking to use the restroom to check their devices, and texting friends throughout the school day. Teachers are constantly having to redirect students and ask them to put their phones away, which not only interrupts instruction but also contributes to teacher burnout. The emotional labor of having to police phone use on a daily basis is draining, and it's pulling focus away from what we're here to do—teach.

There have been more serious instances as well, where students have filmed their peers and posted the videos online without consent, resulting in office referrals and broader concerns about student safety and privacy.

While we have attempted interventions—such as asking repeat offenders to turn in their phones in the morning—this has become increasingly difficult to manage on a consistent basis. With a lack of uniform enforcement across the school, some students have come to see the policy as flexible or optional, which only makes the issue worse.

Many teachers feel caught in the middle. There's a real fear around confronting students about their phones, as reactions can sometimes escalate. This dynamic contributes to an atmosphere where even well-meaning rules lose their power because they're difficult to enforce consistently and fairly.

The bottom line is this: phones are distracting our students from learning and are significantly hindering our ability to teach effectively. This is not just a minor classroom management issue—it's a school-wide challenge that requires a unified, sustainable solution.

Thank you for your continued support of Maine's K-12 educators.

Sincerely,
Christian Perry