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South Portland  
LD 1234

Testimony in Support: LD 1234 An Act to Ban Cellular Telephones from Public School Classrooms  
April 16th, 2025

Representative Campbell and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Victoria Libby. I live in South Portland, and I am a Clinical Psychologist here in Maine.

As a mental health practitioner I have seen firsthand the growing impact of smartphone use on our students' well-being and academic acumen. The unrestricted use of phones during school hours poses serious risks to students' cognitive, emotional, and social development. Below I will outline how this is evident.

Smartphones impair attention and learning. Multiple studies have shown that even the mere presence of a smartphone—let alone active use—can reduce available cognitive capacity and impair working memory (Ward et al., 2017). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable because the prefrontal cortex, which governs impulse control and sustained attention, is still developing well into early adulthood (Casey et al., 2008). When students are frequently interrupted by notifications or feel compelled to check their devices, their ability to focus on instructional content is significantly reduced.

We are seeing troubling increases in anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among youth. A large-scale study by Twenge et al. (2018) linked increased time spent on digital media with higher rates of depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and poor mental health in adolescents.

The development of social skill is being compromised. School is one of the primary settings where students learn empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution. However, studies show that when phones are accessible during peer interactions, the quality of those interactions declines significantly (Misra et al., 2014). In my own clinical practice, I have seen the impact of phones on students ability to engage in psychotherapy. When I hear their reports of interactions at school I hear similar issues with connecting and engaging deeply with other students. They report being physically surrounded by peers but emotionally isolated.

Lastly, we need to address the addictive nature of smartphones. These devices and their apps are designed to exploit reward-based learning through intermittent reinforcement—similar to what we see in gambling behavior (Montag et al., 2019). This creates a cycle of compulsive use. A study by Wilmer, Sherman, and Chein (2017) suggests that smartphone habits can alter neural pathways involved in self-control and habit formation, making it increasingly difficult for students to regulate their usage without external boundaries.

I want to be clear, this is not a call to reject technology all together. Digital tools can be positive and powerful when used intentionally and with guidance. However, we must draw a firm line between educational use and unregulated personal use during school hours. Adults have a hard enough time with this type of self-regulation and we are not aiding our youth enough with this issue considering their underdeveloped self-regulation and executive functioning skills.

Setting these boundaries is not about control—it's about nurture. It's about protecting the psychological and developmental health of our students, giving them the space to grow, to connect authentically, and to learn without constant digital interference. We need to foster our children's ability to tolerate frustration and take time to think deeply about academic questions. Smartphones in school interfere with that learning significantly.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the well-being of the students in Maine.

Sincerely,

Victoria Libby M.S.Ed., Psy.D.