

I am writing in support of LD1234 with amendments, which is the 'bell to bell' ban of smart devices in public schools in Maine. I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist practicing in Portland, Maine. We are currently facing a pediatric mental health crisis in our country and in our state, which is well documented by research data and highlighted by the U.S. Surgeon General, as well as national organizations who care for children, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.

In my clinical work with children and adolescents, I see the impacts of social media/smart device usage on their personal, social, family and academic well-being. There is increasing concern about the negative impacts of screens use on youth including the displacement of healthy activities (sleep, exercise, good nutrition, etc.), contributing to depressive symptoms, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, comparison and eating disordered behavior, exposure to inappropriate sexual content, cyberbullying and impairment of attention during the school day.

In my counseling of youth, I discuss that app, game and device developers hire psychologists to make their products more addictive. These companies profit from our data and the amount of time we spend engaged with our devices. Many youth are deeply ambivalent about their screen use and recognize there are negative impacts on their well-being, yet feel compelled to check their devices. They report feeling like they must constantly be checking their devices and that they fear missing out on something if they are not available in online spaces.

What if we leveled the playing field during the school day? I encourage us to remove the temptation of accessing devices thus minimizing the fear of missing out, minimizing exposure to content that worsens mental health symptoms and providing all children the chance for undivided attention on their academic learning during the school day. This is an educational issue but also a healthcare issue for youth in our state.

Thank you for your consideration,

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