

A Jacoby  
South Portland  
LD 1234

I send this personal testimony to implore you to pass LD 170 creating phone free schools. I have personal experience to share with you regarding two of my children. By the time this legislation is passed, they will have graduated, but I wish to prevent others from the heartache my family went through. Both are now legal adults, so I will keep their information anonymous since they have not agreed to being discussed. We withheld phones until they were in high school. We regularly educated ourselves on available tools to protect them and installed a lock box in our own house, so know that we take this subject quite seriously.

My first child had an IEP throughout their schooling in Maine. Being bullied is a common refrain among their peer group. When such conflicts happen in person, there is a chance that an adult is familiar with the parties and can intervene. This is less likely when done via texting and social media. My child was eventually groomed by a jailed sex offender online who was met through a schoolmate. Imagine their tanking emotional well being. Now imagine what it's like to watch your outgoing child withdraw from social interactions and exhibit increasing anxiety and depression. Eventually, federal authorities stepped in.

Why didn't we intervene sooner? We had the phone locked down using modern parental restriction software. The student hive is strong when it comes to gaining full access to the entire internet. This child, who relied on academic support to manage their language related disabilities, fell into an online crowd that instructed them on how to explore and maintain contact with dangerous individuals. We could survey their internet usage at home via wifi activities, but not at school.

Another child of ours has severe ADHD and a 504. In high school, this child's teachers supposedly restrict cell phones and monitor electronic devices. Through regular scans of the phone battery and observance of the child's descending grades and emotional well being, it was clear to us that the teachers gave up. We even emphasized in parent teacher conferences that due to impulsivity, our child had a severe weakness when it came to cell phone use/misuse. These conversations melted away as the year progressed and our child became further addicted to the phone.

One teacher started the year expecting the children to leave their phones in a special docking spot, but they stopped checking according to our child. Another teacher said they had no rules about where to put devices and just expected this academically advanced group of students to exhibit self-control. This is what results when there is not a coherent school strategy that includes leaving the phones at the entrance of the school. How nice it would be for teachers to get to teach students who are more engaged and less distracted. How nice it would be to take the policing of said devices out of the teacher's already overly full hands!

Dare I say we all know what the dopamine rush of social media feels like? Now, take our adult brains several iterations backwards to the incomplete maturation of a high school student's brain. The idea that the majority of students can resist the buzz of their phone or ignore the tantalizing next message or post from their favorite person or group is ludicrous! Then look at studies on texting while driving and that it takes time for the brain to release itself from the text and re engage with the surrounding roads. Apply that principle of slow refocus to the classroom and see how that plays out with classroom instruction or in class work. It's no wonder school performance is descending so drastically!

Finally, I'd like to mention my own thoughts on communicating with my student during the school day. I have absolutely NO reservations about instituting strict no phone rules in school. We had a few lockdowns at our school and during one, our child texted us. I would have been fine not communicating with my child during that experience. I trust our teachers, staff and administration to take care of my children. It is not my place to instruct my child from afar. Dismissal and meeting places were sent

through a communication portal that worked well.

Thank you for your attention to this serious societal challenge. I trust you to use your leadership to protect our children during the school day by banning phones in school.