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Chairpersons and members of the committee,

My name is Dan Quinn and I am a parent of three school-aged children in Scarborough, Maine. I am also an actuary with a background in statistics, and I am here today to voice strong support for a bell-to-bell phone-free school day.

The 2024 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—widely referred to as the Nation’s Report Card—show that Maine students are experiencing the sharpest academic declines in decades. Our fourth and eighth graders are now performing at their lowest levels in over 30 years in both reading and math.

- Fourth Grade Math: Average score of 233 (national average: 237), with only 33% of students performing at or above grade level.^{[L1][SEP]}

- Fourth Grade Reading: Average score of 210, with just 26% reading at grade level—a steep drop from 36% in 2019.^{[L1][SEP]}

- Eighth Grade Math: Average score of 273 (just above the national average), with only 25% meeting grade-level standards.^{[L1][SEP]}

- Eighth Grade Reading: Average score of 255, with just 26% reading at grade level, down from 36% in 2019.

We are one of just 14 states performing significantly below the national average in core subjects.

The NAEP sample includes 1,500 randomly selected students, inclusive of students that require additional support. The NAEP is a national benchmark, and the methodology is consistent across the country. While no measurement tool can be perfect, it remains a strong and reliable indicator of overall academic performance. Maine’s own Department of Education uses NAEP data on its official dashboard.

As an actuary, I can say with confidence that a 1,500-student sample is more than sufficient to achieve the statistical credibility necessary to support such a study.

- To measure performance, a sample of just 400 would be sufficient to measure performance of a statewide population of approximately 170,000 K-12 students at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. This is a typical threshold for defining necessary sample sizes.

- A 1,500 sample, as employed by the NAEP by comparison, increases confidence to 98% within a 3% margin of error—well within the range of what is considered credible and robust. This is solid data, and we should not ignore it.

This is a decision that has to be made at the state level. Relying on local control has led to a patchwork of policies—some schools have done something, others have done nothing. There is inconsistency in policy, and that results in inconsistent access to focus-centered, learning environments.

Further, many communities lack the resources necessary to properly evaluate policy proposals and emerging data, resulting in well intended public servants making their best attempt at defining policy without the considering all available data. In communities like Scarborough, school boards are already stretched thin with other priorities such as new building projects. Meanwhile, principals are left to implement piecemeal solutions and navigate vocal opposition from students—many of whom are already attached to devices and are not engaging with the full body of research, often considering their own phone usage as the exception to problems these devices create for students and their peers.

We cannot ask individual school districts to solve this on their own. A statewide law would lift the burden from local schools and ensure that every student in Maine—no matter their zip code—has access to a focused, distraction-free learning environment.

The data is clear. The urgency is real. We need to act now.