

Testimony in support of LD 170 “**Resolve, Establishing a Pilot Program to Reduce Personal Electronic Device Distractions During the School Day**”, & LD 1234 “**An Act to Ban Cellular Telephones from Public School Classrooms**”

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Campbell and members of the Education Committee,

- 1) My name is Matt Pines. I'm a parent of a cellphone-free 8th grader, director of a device-free summer camp for teens for over 25 years, a PhD candidate at Muskie, co-author of a MEPRI report on social media's impact on adolescent mental health, and advisor to [Sapien Labs](#), a non-profit global mind health research group. I'm also a member of local parent groups committed to reclaiming schools and communities for childhood and education such as Turn the Tide Coalition.
- 2) I want to start with a couple of definitions – **Bell-to-bell**. Different from a classroom policy, it means students do not have access to phones from the start of the school day to dismissal bell. **Device** – any internet connected device, so a phone, smartwatch, or tablet. **Phone locker/phone pouch/phone hotel** – phone lockers and pouches prevent kids from accessing phones with a lock, typically for the whole school day. It is worth noting that there are many free/very low cost alternatives to commercially available solution. Don't get too caught up on any one solution. Phone hotels are used in classrooms for the duration of a class period, typically a row of pockets hung on the wall or door of the classroom. Notably, kids are finding ways to use phones while they are in phone hotels – see testimony from an anonymous student for one example.
- 3) First, I want to point out that multiple studies report that kids and teens appreciate and enjoy being device free. What they don't like is being the only kid without a phone. But if you give them the opportunity to be in a device free space, they love it. Further, teachers love it. [75% of teachers surveyed by the NEA](#) support a restriction that goes beyond the classroom.
- 4) Beyond that, there are several very real harms to kids. Let's stick to the issue of learning. It is widely recognized that cellphones in the classroom actively interfere with student learning, both for the student who owns the phone, and other kids in the classroom with them. As a result, many schools now have policies that prohibit or limit student cell phone use in the classroom. BUT - Cell phones also interfere with learning outside of the classroom. The skills learned outside of the classroom, interacting with peers, are at least as important as academic skills. In fact, we're beginning to appreciate that “non-academic” skills are foundational to success. Kids strong in these skills build stronger connections, which are the best predictor of school success. Kids strong in these non-academic skills have better outcomes at college and career. We need students who know how to communicate, collaborate, resolve conflicts, make and strengthen connections. None of you got to where you are without a robust set of “social skills”, and phones in schools rob kids of the opportunity to develop those skills in the most socially enriched environment that they have access to.
- 5) You have in front of you today two bills that address the issue of phones in schools. One is a voluntary pilot program that has a fiscal note attached. One is a mandate that has no

fiscal note, and no fiscal impact. But weighing fiscal concerns against local control is not the way to think about this. Instead please consider that there is a consensus that cellphone use is harming kids, that schools can provide a sanctuary and space for kids and teens to focus on learning the academic and interpersonal skills that they need to succeed, that many of our neighboring states including MA, and VT are doing this, that in those states and countries around the world – the sky has not fallen, kids are safe in school, and achievement scores and mental health are improving. Students like it, teachers and administrators like it, and a whole lot of parents like it.

- 6) Speaking of parents, you may hear that a subset of parents rejects the idea that students should not have their phones throughout the day, and that they need to be able to contact their students during school hours. However, a recent study found that on average, students were using their phones for over an hour each school day, with almost half that time spent on Instagram. 25% of students averaged over 2 hours on their phones, during school time, per day. Is this really the most efficient, effective way for parents to communicate with their students, and for students to learn?

- 7) You may also hear those against this bill cite two recent, highly publicized articles, one from the US, one from the UK.

The US study claims that outcomes are no worse for kids who own smart phones as young as 8, compared to their peers who do not “own” phones. However, when the issue of ownership is put aside, and instead screen-time/device-usage was compared, the effect disappeared. More use, earlier use = worse outcomes. Whether a child is using their “own” smartphone or a parents, or instead using a tablet, is beside the point. The issues arise from usage, not whose name comes up on caller ID.

The UK study made headlines by claiming that school cellphone policies had no impact on student outcomes. Again, this study was deeply flawed by poorly defined terms. In this case, the authors based their classification of whether a school was “permissive” or “restrictive” based on what the school said, versus what the school DID. Of the 20 “restrictive” schools in the study, only 4 actually restricted student phone access during the school day. Most schools classified restrictive were functionally identical to those classified permissive.

In neither case was there an actual finding that minimizing or eliminating phone use had no effect. Instead, it is almost as if the authors played around with definitions in order to attract headlines, which they certainly did.

- 8) Finally, let me address the limits of local control – There are real benefits to a bell-to-bell policy as educational best practice, and we recognize that some schools are already much further down this path. Morse HS did it. Portland Public Schools is considering this for all grades. But we want all Maine students to have access to a healthier school climate sooner than later. This is not one of those issues that hits differently depending on where you live. It is global. It impacts rural and urban kids alike. Whether you are in Turner, Tokyo or Tanzania, if you are a kid in a school with phones, there are impacts. In Maine we have seen that we really need to improve student grades and reduce bullying, suspensions, and distraction. As a former SB member, I understand and support the ideal of local control. However, there are issues in which we see local control reach a limit. This is one. The worst thing that could happen is for a school to take these steps,

then backtrack when a school board elects a new chair, or a new superintendent takes the reins who doesn't understand the issue.

Matt Pines
Falmouth
LD 1234

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4) Beyond that, there are several very real harms to kids. Let's stick to the issue of learning. It is widely recognized that cellphones in the classroom actively interfere with student learning, both for the student who owns the phone, and other kids in the classroom with them. As a result, many schools now have policies that prohibit or limit student cell phone use in the classroom. BUT - Cell phones also interfere with learning outside of the classroom. The skills learned outside of the classroom, interacting with peers, are at least as important as academic skills. In fact, we're beginning to appreciate that “non-academic” skills are foundational to success. Kids strong in these skills build stronger connections, which are the best predictor of school success. Kids strong in these non-academic skills have better outcomes at college and career. We need students who know how to communicate, collaborate, resolve conflicts, make and strengthen connections. None of you got to where you are without a robust set of “social skills”, and phones in schools rob kids of the opportunity to develop those skills in the most socially enriched environment that they have access to.

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