

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Michelle Jackson, and my husband and I are parents of three kids in Scarborough. I support LD 1234 and am passionate about the need for implementing a device-free school day policy.

My support for this initiative is rooted in the growing body of evidence connecting the decline in youth mental health to the rise in cell phone usage since 2010. My husband, who has worked as an emergency room doctor in Southern Maine since 2013, has witnessed this crisis firsthand. He regularly treats children—some as young as six years old—experiencing acute mental health issues like depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts. This is not an abstract concern; the mental health crisis among children and teens is real, and it's happening right here in our own community.

Beyond mental health, I'm also deeply concerned about the addictive nature of smartphones, especially for developing brains. As adults, we know how difficult it can be to disconnect from our phones; for kids and teens, who lack fully developed self-regulation skills, the pull is even stronger. Excessive use can lead to lasting issues like compulsive behavior, anxiety, and poor focus. That's a scary reality.

As many people point out, smartphone addiction is part of a broader issue of excessive screen time—one that families must also address at home. However, a phone-free school policy is one of the few concrete, systemic actions that we can take as a community to begin to reverse these alarming trends in youth mental health and behavioral development.

Over the past year, I have been involved in efforts to implement a phone-free school policy at the local level in Scarborough. We gathered a petition of more than 400 signatures from concerned Scarborough parents, teachers, and community members who recognize the harm that smartphones and social media are having on our children. Despite broad parent support, it became clear from meetings and conversations with school leaders that our local schools are simply stretched too thin to take this on alone.

That's why I'm supporting state-level action; Maine should be proactive in protecting the health and well-being of its students. The research is clear. Other states, and even entire countries, have already adopted phone-free school policies because of the documented harm to children. To assume that Maine students are unaffected by phone use in schools is both unrealistic and short-sighted. Our students deserve six to seven hours a day free from digital distractions—time to focus on learning, friendships, and just being kids.

Thank you for considering this important step for Maine's children.

Sincerely,

**Michelle Jackson**

Parent, Scarborough, ME