

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Ryan Jackson, and I am writing today to express my strong support for the proposed implementation of bell-to-bell phone-free school days in Maine.

I live in Scarborough with my wife and our three young children. For the past 12 years, I have served as an emergency room physician at several hospitals in Southern Maine. Through both my professional and personal experiences, I have become increasingly concerned about the growing impact of smartphones and social media on the mental health of our youth.

Over the last decade, I have witnessed a dramatic increase in mental health-related visits among children and adolescents in the emergency department. What was once rare has become routine. These visits span a wide spectrum—ranging from anxiety, depression, and behavioral outbursts to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Children severe enough to require psychiatric hospitalization can remain in the emergency department for days, due to a lack of available psychiatric beds.

Now certainly, the mental health crisis facing our youth is complex and multifaceted. However, a growing body of research—and my own firsthand experience—suggests that excessive phone use and the pressures of social media are significant contributing factors. I have treated multiple young patients who have expressed suicidal thoughts directly tied to their phones being taken away.

While broader conversations about smartphone use in childhood are important, the implementation of device-free school days is a practical step forward. Allowing students seven hours each day free from phone use gives them a chance to engage fully in their education and build face-to-face social skills, away from constant digital stimulation.

This is not a radical idea. Other states and even countries are pursuing similar policies in response to the same challenges. Maine has the opportunity—and, I would argue, the responsibility—to act in the best interests of its children.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ryan Jackson

Emergency Department Physician
Parent, Scarborough, ME