

April 15, 2025

To the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Julie Baird, and I live in Pownal Maine in the RSU 5 district. I fully support the Act for Safe, Attentive, and Focused Education for Maine both as a parent and teacher. Earlier in my career, I was a full time elementary school teacher in Pennsylvania for several years. When I moved to Maine, I chose substitute teaching for flexibility as a parent. Since then I have done day to day subbing as well as long term substitute teaching positions. While I cannot claim to speak for educators as a whole, I can speak to my experience and what I see as an educator.

Personal digital devices are a distraction for students and a constant source of tension in the classrooms for teachers. As we are all well aware, phones are sources of endless entertainment and stimulation. Students essentially have the entirety of the world's amusement at their fingertips. Even the most engaging of teachers cannot compete. As a society, we should see to it that teachers don't have to.

This year alone I have had several experiences where I have found students watching movies on their digital device under their desks when they should be working on an assignment. More often than not, these movies are not only distracting but inappropriate for children of any age. This is not only concerning for the students in question, but for those students around them who are also exposed.

Even for those students who do not have their devices out for entertainment purposes, they are constantly checking them for messages or alerts that they feel must be addressed immediately. Even a slight glance down at their phone is enough to pull them out of engagement for a matter of minutes. Valuable time and instruction is lost before attention is recaptured. If this distraction is eliminated, then we can only assume that academic performance will increase.

Allowing this issue to be addressed on a teacher-by-teacher or even school-by-school basis will not have the same effectiveness. Within schools that I have been involved in, there are varying levels of enforcement when it comes to keeping devices out of the classroom. Those teachers that are vigilant are labeled as "bad guys" even though they have the students' best interests at heart. The lack of uniformity also creates a climate of confusion and hostility between teachers and students. If the policy were uniform across the state, it would essentially make this a nonissue, allowing teachers to teach and students to learn.

Once the classroom environment is free of distracting devices, student engagement and participation will increase and teachers will be able to do their job with more ease. Students will have less conflict with their teachers and each other, allowing that energy to be focused towards where it should be: academic success. I urge you to support the Act for Safe, Attentive, and Focused Education for Maine—for the benefit of our students, teachers, and future.

Sincerely,

Julie Baird

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Pownal
LD 1234

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