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Dear Representatives,

I am the mother of two girls, one ten and the other turning fourteen, who has long been concerned about the effect of smartphones on kids. My husband and I have been fortunate enough to find a school (private) for my older daughter's middle school years where both the rules and culture did not permit the use of cellphones at any point in the day. I am concerned as my younger daughter enters our public middle school next year and our older daughter enters our public high school, that our district does not have strict enough policies in place to provide the safest and most beneficial educational, social and emotional experience for my kids. I also understand that it is difficult for the district to implement strict policies due to pushback from a few. For this reason, I am writing to ask for support at the state level.

I worry that the potential presence of smartphones in school will raise the opportunity for bullying (and decrease the opportunities for students who are being bullied over social media to get a few hours of respite from the experience). I worry about exposure to inappropriate content during lunchtime, which I may have some hope of restricting on my kids' devices and no chance of influencing on those of their classmates). I worry about distraction, addiction, but the thing I worry most about quite simply is the opportunity cost of allowing these kids to have phone access in school which degrades the quality of their attention and therefore the social and academic experiences they have.

My older daughter went to a tennis camp a couple years ago and left saying, "I never want to go back. Please only send me to camps where phones are banned." She did not have a smartphone, because at 11 we had not yet given her one, and she experienced a lunch period between drills and games, seated at picnic tables beneath the shade of trees, in total silence. Even the teenage counselors were lost to their smartphones. She had elected to attend the camp without a friend, figuring that if she went alone she would be more open and have a greater chance of making new friends. Needless to say, that did not happen.

I see no argument for why we have allowed phones to proliferate in schools and distract the way they do. Children attended schools for decades and for generations without them. The presence of personal phones puts unnecessary strain on teachers too. Please help administrators at the district level by responding at the state level. Please pass a bill to support Maine's school staff and its children, and fight for phone-free schools.

Yours sincerely,

Amelia Van Dessel