

My name is Elizabeth Coughlin. I hold a Master of Public Health and have spent my career in healthcare administration. As a student of public health and a resident of Scarborough, I'm here to express strong support for LD 1234, which would establish bell-to-bell phone-free school days across Maine.

This issue touches on public health, educational fairness and student well-being—and we need to treat it with the seriousness it deserves. Every student in Maine deserves the benefits of a school day that is truly focused, distraction-free, and supportive of their learning. And that kind of environment is only possible if we address the constant presence of smartphones in our classrooms.

This isn't just a parenting issue—it's a collective action problem.

One parent can choose to have their own child leave their phone at home. But that choice only goes so far. Even if that child is phone-free, they're still sitting in a classroom surrounded by buzzing, pinging, glowing screens. One Snapchat alert or group text can break the focus of an entire room. A vibrating phone in a backpack still pulls at a student's attention. That's how distraction works.

Phones aren't just personal distractions—they're environmental ones. One student scrolling TikTok can easily draw in the student next to them. One ping in a quiet room pulls focus from every child within earshot.

And that's the core of this problem: even when individual families do the right thing, it doesn't fix the broader learning environment. We can't solve this student by student or classroom by classroom. It takes coordinated, system-wide action.

That's exactly what a bell-to-bell phone-free school day provides. It removes the burden from individual parents, teachers, and kids—and instead creates a culture that supports learning, focus, and human connection for *everyone* in the building.

This isn't about going backwards. It's not about fear of technology or trying to erase progress. It's about being honest about the role that *personal* devices are playing in our classrooms—and making smart, research-backed choices to build learning environments that truly support academic success and mental health.

We also need to be real about fairness. Online harassment doesn't affect all students equally. National data show that Black teens are more likely to be cyberbullied based on race. LGBTQ+ students are nearly twice as likely to experience electronic bullying compared to their peers. And when students are constantly connected at school, they're constantly vulnerable to this kind of harm. It follows them into the classroom, into the lunchroom—there is no escape.

A phone-free school day gives all students—especially the most vulnerable—a break from that constant digital pressure. It gives them space to learn, to build relationships, and to just be kids.

Finally, this decision *must* be made at the state level. Relying on local school districts and boards has led to a patchwork of policies—some schools have acted, others haven't. That leaves students with unequal access to focused learning environments. And it puts principals in a tough spot—forced to navigate pushback on their own, often from parents who simply haven't seen the research.

We can't expect schools to solve this one by one. It's inefficient and it's inequitable. A statewide policy would bring clarity, consistency, and fairness—giving all Maine students the same opportunity to thrive.

Bell-to-bell phone-free legislation is how we get there. It's a smart, scalable solution that prioritizes learning, health, and equity.

Thank you for your time—and for supporting a better future for Maine's students.