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LD 1234

Dear Maine Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Hasenfus. I am a parent of two school aged children and I live in Scarborough, Maine. I'm here today in strong support of bell-to-bell phone-free school policies.

We all know that phones are a major distraction in the classroom. Some schools have classroom-only bans, allowing devices during lunch or breaks. That may help with academics—but we're not talking nearly enough about the social cost.

Phones are hindering our kids socially, and it's backed by data.

Since 2010, there's been a 134% increase in anxiety and a 106% increase in depression among adolescents. Most heartbreakingly, 22% of high school students have seriously considered suicide in the past year. That's 1 in every 5 students.

School loneliness rates have doubled since 2012.

95% of teachers say anxiety and depression are a problem.

87% say bullying is a problem.

These numbers are real, and they are urgent. They come directly from the Phone-Free Schools Administrator Toolkit

Here's a glimpse of what this looks like: only 8% of teen boys have ever asked someone out in person. I once saw a student's boyfriend walk right by her outside school—they didn't even make eye contact. But they text all day. This is the world our kids are navigating—relationships without real connection.

Some worry that taking away phones all day might make it harder for students to connect. But the opposite is true. Social media fosters shallow, asynchronous interactions that often increase anxiety and loneliness.

Bell-to-bell phone-free policies give students back the chance to connect in real life. They create space for stronger friendships and healthier social-emotional development.

And we're seeing results.

Lunchrooms are louder and more vibrant, filled with face-to-face conversation.

Counselors report fewer mental health visits—students are less stressed.

Bullying drops by nearly 50%—46% for girls, 43% for boys—after phone bans are put in place.

Yes, some students may feel anxious at first without their phones. That's understandable. But face-to-face interaction with peers is what actually reduces anxiety. And our schools are filled with caring adults—teachers, counselors, staff—who are ready to support them.

We're not making school harder—we're making it healthier.

A bell-to-bell phone-free policy gives kids what they need most: time, space, and the conditions to grow into resilient, socially connected, and emotionally healthy young people.

Thank you for your time—and for taking this important step forward for Maine's students.