

Kim Whitman - Testimony in SUPPORT of LD1234 as amended to be bell-to-bell

I am one of the original co-founders of the nonprofit, the [Phone-Free Schools Movement](#) and I am now working with the [Distraction-Free Schools Policy Project](#) to ensure states across the nation implement effective phone-free school legislation.

The Phone-Free Schools Movement spent an entire year talking to administrators and teachers across the nation to learn about their phone policies - what works and what doesn't. From those conversations we developed the best practice definition for phone-free policies: a "first bell to last bell" policy that requires all personal electronic devices (cell phones, smartwatches, earbuds, AirPods, fitness trackers and Bluetooth connected headphones, etc.) are securely locked away and inaccessible for the entire school day. We also created the [Phone-Free Schools Administrator Toolkit](#) which provides a roadmap for schools to successfully implement a bell-to-bell policy.

The Distraction-Free Schools Policy Project developed a [model bill](#) for phone and social media free schools that meets the best practice definition established by the Phone-Free Schools Movement. **I am testifying in full support of LD 1234 as amended to match this model legislation - bell to bell where phones are locked away.**

Studies have found that:

- 97% of students use phones during the school day for an average of 43 minutes.
- Those 43 minutes are spent on social media, YouTube and gaming.
- One third of teens report being exposed to pornography at school.
- 35% of teens admit to using their phone to cheat.
- 65% of students report being distracted by digital devices in class.
- And according to the Pew Research Center, 72% of U.S. high school teachers say cell phone distraction is a major problem in the classroom.

And that is backed by research. In 2017 the Brain Drain Study found that:

- The mere presence of a cell phone, even when it is silenced and stored out of sight, reduces cognitive capacity.
- Students performed best when the phone was in a separate room.
- They found this to be important when taking tests but even more crucial when learning something new.

The majority of teachers want phones out of the classroom as well. In 2024, the National Education Association conducted a poll that identified:

- 83% of the members support prohibiting cell phone and personal device use during the entire school day, from the first bell to the last bell.
- Over 90% of educators feel student's mental health is a serious issue at their school and a majority also say there has been a significant increase in concerns related to student mental health in the past few years.

And here's why:

- 95% of teenagers are on social media and 40% of 8-12 year olds are as well.
- On average teens spend nearly 5 hours per day on social media apps.
- According to the American Psychological Association, when teens spend more than 3 hours per day on social media, their risk of poor mental health DOUBLES. Meaning they are twice as likely to become depressed or anxious.

Even the US Surgeon General who issued an Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health has stated “Schools should ensure that classroom learning and social time are phone-free experiences.”

The amended version of LD 1234 would do just that. Ensure students are free from distractions during class and during social times like lunch and passing periods.

Also, I want to share that implementing a bell to bell phone-free policy does not have to be costly. There are several proven affordable storage methods for phones. Some examples include: phone lockers, pencil pouches stored in baskets and locked away or padded manilla envelopes stored in crates and locked away for the day. For more information, please reference the [Phone-Free Schools on a Budget webinar](#) hosted by the Becca Schmill Foundation and Smartphone Free Childhood US.

In closing, I want to thank Representative Campbell for introducing LD 1234 and amending it to meet the best practice model bill language - bell to bell with a storage tool. I also want to thank Senator Stacy Brenner for all her work on the bill as well as the members of the committee for considering it. When the amended version of LD 1234 becomes law, Maine will be leading the way for all students to focus, engage and thrive in school.