



**Sagadahoc County
Sheriff's Office**

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To: RSU 1 Cell Phone Committee
From: Sheriff Joel Merry
RE: Cell Phone Use in Schools

Date: 02/01/2024

Members of the Committee,

I have been asked to provide a short statement on law enforcement's position on student cell phone use in schools. Having been in law enforcement for several decades, I have seen many changes, but without a doubt the single most impactful change has been in the advancement of technology in cell phones. Never before have so many people possessed or owned a cell phone, including high school and middle school students. The constantly evolving technology related to cell phones is both positive and negative.

There are documented pros and cons to allowing cell phone use by students. If one could guarantee that cell phones would be used for academic purposes, they could be extremely advantageous. However, according to a 2020 research paper by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) reports that cell phone use among middle and high school students is negatively associated with children's academic and social-emotional outcomes.

From a law enforcement perspective, cyberbullying and emotional distress over unmitigated social media discourse can cause real health and safety problems. In addition, these issues can lead to an inability to focus and distraction to the school learning environment.

According to the National School Safety and Security Services, cell phone use during a crisis can create less safe school emergency responses. The use of cell phones can accelerate the unintentional, and even intentional, spread of misinformation, rumors, and fear. This can adversely affect public safety first responders.

I would urge the Committee to consider adopting a policy that strictly regulates the use of cell phones by students in our schools. This is not to say that cell phones should be banned, but there should be appropriate guidelines on when and where they can be used, taking into account procedures for emergency notifications and communications.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel A. Merry".

Joel A. Merry