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Members of the committee,

My name is Megan Hines and I am a parent of three children in Scarborough, Maine.

I am writing today to voice strong support for a bell-to-bell phone-free school day. The 2024 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—widely referred to as the Nation’s Report Card—show that Maine students are

experiencing the sharpest academic declines in decades. Our fourth and eighth graders are now performing at their lowest levels in over 30 years in both reading and math.

The NAEP sample includes 1,500 randomly selected students, inclusive of students that require additional support. The NAEP is a national benchmark, and the methodology is consistent across the country. While no measurement tool can be perfect, it remains a strong and reliable indicator of overall academic performance. Maine’s own Department of Education uses NAEP data on its official dashboard.

A 1,500 student sample is sufficient to achieve a 98% confidence level on a 3% margin of error, which is much tighter than is typically applied to statistical results like these. The 1,500 survey is a very strong, statistical indicator of performance despite not being a complete sample of every student in the state. This is solid data, and we can not ignore it.

Studies in the U.S. and Europe show that removing student access to cell phones in school improves academic performance. Removing personal devices is not a comprehensive solution, but I believe it must be a component of our state’s plan.

Further, while I recognize that technology can be a valuable educational tool when used with clear purpose and structure, the reality I hear about classrooms today is very different. Devices are no longer just tools for learning—they’ve become distractions that compete with teachers for our children’s attention. To the extent technology is required, school issued devices are available to support research and academic exercises.

Additionally, instead of socializing face-to-face, students are retreating into their devices, which damages their ability to form meaningful relationships and navigate social situations. At a town discussion this past winter, students were arguing that devices were necessary for students that did not have friends to sit with during lunch. I would argue that such an anecdote is evidence that the distraction of devices is a problem, not a solution.

There’s also an equity issue. Not all students have access to the same quality of devices, which can widen the gap between those who are already ahead and those who are struggling to keep up.

Phone-free schools is a decision that has to be made at the state level. Relying on local control has led to a patchwork of policies—some schools are exploring different approaches, others have done nothing. There is inconsistency in policy, and that results

in inconsistent access to focus-centered, learning environments.

Further, many communities lack the resources necessary to properly evaluate policy proposals and emerging data, resulting in well intended school boards and administrators making their best attempt at defining policy, often relying on limited data.

In communities like Scarborough, school boards are already stretched thin with other priorities such as new building projects. Meanwhile, principals are left to implement piecemeal solutions and navigate vocal opposition from students—many of whom are already attached to devices, often considering their own phone usage as the exception to problems these devices create for students and their peers.

We cannot ask individual school districts to solve this on their own. A statewide law would lift the burden from local schools and ensure that every student in Maine—no matter their zip code—has access to a focused, distraction-free learning environment.

The state defines curriculum because it's resource intensive and important. The evidence confirms devices deteriorate academic performance, social development, and mental health. It requires the same level of state attention to ensure children across the state receive the same benefits.

I appreciate the committee's attention. Thank you