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Turn the Tide Coalition

Testimony in Support of LD 2052

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education Committee,

I'm here today simply as a very concerned parent.

My son is an intelligent 10th grader who loves to learn. But his severe ADHD means his brain doesn't regulate attention or impulses like most. Where many students can tune out distractions or push through, he cannot.

Like so many students, he's expected to use study hall to catch up, to refocus, to regulate. But most days, that time becomes anything but productive. Instead of engaging with his school work, he — and so many of his classmates — pull out their school-issued devices and open Minecraft, Roblox, Snapchat. Not because they're lazy, but because these digital distractions are designed to hijack attention, and that's especially detrimental to the more vulnerable kids.

What's more, most students have learned to bypass the weak school-installed restrictions through private networks that never should have been allowed on school-issued devices in the first place.

And even more frustrating, it happens in my home, where I've tried everything to help him stay focused — only to watch him instantly switch to his schoolwork and appear to be working the moment I walk in, when in reality he's spent the past hour pulled away by every other distraction available on a device I did not give him and over which I have no control.

Given how much effort it takes just to stay focused, it raises a direct question about what we're realistically asking of our kids. And not just my son, but all students: is this a reasonable expectation?

I've raised these concerns locally, with our district IT Department, the principal, and school board members. But every time, I walk away feeling like I'm speaking into silence. I have to also add, to address your question Representative Lyman, I and two other parents that I know of have reached out more than once specifically asking for some transparency from our IT Dept. Once, I received a vague response to the effect of 'there are parameters in place and we are making real time decisions to address this' My second inquiry was met with silence. The truth is, they either do not know how to do this, or more likely, they know how, but don't have the bandwidth and are waiting for more noise to force action (enter this proposed resolve)

That helplessness is heavy. There are hundreds of families in Maine living the same experience feeling overlooked, dismissed, or just plain tired.

What we're seeing in K-12 classrooms isn't abstract — it's deeply personal and painful. Devices meant to support learning have become constant sources of distraction. Teachers, already overwhelmed, find themselves policing screens rather than teaching. As a result, focus is slipping, engagement is waning, and too many kids are retreating from their schoolwork, anxious and disheartened rather than inspired.

That is not a trajectory we should accept.

Members of this committee — you took these seats to ask hard questions, to evaluate whether systems are functioning, and to help create accountability when they are not. This request for transparency and intentional thinking around technology isn't about rules and control, it's about protecting our students and empowering educators to do what they do best in an environment that has fallen short of supporting either stakeholder.

We are at a societal tipping point. Awareness of technology's impact on kids' brains and behavior is growing every day. But Maine, like most other states, is struggling to confront this issue thoughtfully and proactively.

So I ask again: Why aren't we asking the hard questions now?

I would be remiss not to also acknowledge the work this committee has done on LD 1234. And while it didn't solve every challenge, it encouraged districts to confront a problem that had long been ignored. And we've already received positive feedback from teachers and parents, grateful that this important issue is being talked about in a meaningful way.

Now LD 2052 invites us to ask a simple but meaningful question: how do we strengthen a system that's clearly struggling to support students' focus and learning, especially those who are most vulnerable? LD 2052 will provide quantifiable data for Maine that will help form future policy at the district level.

Doing nothing is not neutral. It is an endorsement of the current system and right now, that system is failing Maine students.

You have the opportunity and authority to change course. I am asking you on behalf of every parent who wants to be here but cannot. Please use that authority to bring transparency and accountability to how technology is affecting our children's education.

Thank you.

