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Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Gattine and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee.

My name is Matt Pines - I am a resident of Falmouth Maine, parent of a 9th grade student, and researcher studying the impact of cellphone and device use on adolescent wellbeing.

I urge you to lend your full and unequivocal support to Governor Mills' proposal to prohibit cellphones and personal electronics for the duration of the school day in Maine schools from August 2026 onwards.

The research around the impact of devices on cognition is clear – they interfere with learning. To remove smartphones from classrooms is an obvious first move, but it does not sufficiently protect students from harm.

This step does not go far enough for two main reasons.

The first is that even if phones are kept in “phone hotels” on the back of classroom doors, or in pockets or backpacks, they can still have impacts in the classroom – they can serve as a hotspot allowing access to websites and services otherwise blocked by school networks; used for recording other students without their knowledge; used for screen-mirroring to laptops in order to waste time or cheat; or simply being a distraction when notifications pop-up. The only way to entirely protect against these harms is to keep cellphones and other personal electronics out of student's possession and away from the classroom entirely.

The second main reason a classroom only policy is insufficient is the fact that cellphones interfere with learning outside the classroom also. Kids and teens are learning from each other (discussing ideas from the class that just ended, asking for help preparing for upcoming quizzes, etc) immediately after leaving the classroom. They are also forming and strengthening connections to their fellow students and staff, learning how to make and keep friends. This process of connection formation is disrupted by the presence of phones and devices.

One of the criticisms some school administrators express in reaction to the idea of a bell-to-bell ban is the belief that kids and teens are just going to go home and use social media, gaming and other apps there, so what difference does a ban at school make? This criticism is not supported by the available evidence, and is a dereliction of the role schools play in the community.

Kids and teens who make friends and plans in real life use less social media and games. Evidence from recent studies shows that students with real life connections use devices for a significantly shorter duration than those who are socially isolated. Denying students the opportunity to engage with their peers to make those friends and plans at school, the ONE place they are sure to see those peers, is harmful.

Further, by not taking action and prohibiting devices for the school day, schools are ignoring the important public health role that they should be playing. Maine schools happily talk about and model established best practices for their communities in all kinds of ways – fire safety, concussion awareness, healthy nutrition, vaccine recommendations, responsible substance use.

Social media addiction is the result of a degraded social environment. The solution to solving the crisis of too much screen time is to increase the opportunities for screen-free time, and enhance the availability and appeal of non-screen-based activities within communities, starting (but not ending) with a device-free school day.

I urge you to pass Governor Mills' proposal.