

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

My name is Mileva Repasky, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the **Phone-Free Schools Movement** in support of **LD 2212**, which would establish a bell-to-bell phone/personal communication device ban in Maine schools.

Purpose and Context

The intent of LD 2212 is to create healthier learning environments by eliminating constant access to personal communication devices (including smartphones and wearables) during the school day – from the first bell to the last. The goal is not punishment, but restoration: restoring students' focus, peer interaction, and protected cognitive space for sustained learning.

Phones in schools have been shown to negatively impact student attention and wellbeing. According to surveys of teachers nationwide, an overwhelming majority report that phones distract from instruction and harm students' mental health and attention span. In one recent survey, more than half of public school leaders indicated that cell phones hurt academic performance and that a large majority believe phones negatively affect students' mental health and ability to focus in school.

Evidence Supporting Phone Restrictions

1. Reduced Distraction and Increased Engagement

Research indicates that districts and schools that ban smartphone use during the school day report improved student focus, reduced classroom disruptions, and better engagement with learning. Analysis of policies implemented across multiple schools has found that cell phone bans contribute to fewer distractions during instructional time and create a more conducive academic environment.

2. Positive Academic Outcomes

Studies outside the U.S. have associated complete phone bans with measurable improvements in student outcomes. In a widely cited study in the United Kingdom, banning mobile phones in schools was linked with modest but meaningful improvements in exam performance, with effects especially pronounced among students with lower prior achievement.

3. Teacher and Administrator Perspectives

Educator voices amplify these findings. National teacher surveys report that phone restrictions reduce classroom distractions and help schools reclaim attention for instruction — a key element of learning and achievement.

4. Practitioner-Centered Support

The Phone-Free Schools Movement (PFSM) provides a comprehensive, practitioner-centered support system for schools, districts, and policymakers seeking to implement effective bell-to-bell phone-free policies.

Our resources include:

- The Administrator Toolkit — A research-informed, step-by-step implementation guide that draws from real-world case studies and field experience. It includes communication strategies, enforcement frameworks, stakeholder engagement guidance, and tools for measuring impact.
- The Ambassador Toolkit — Designed to empower parents, educators, and community leaders with advocacy materials, messaging guidance, and strategic support for advancing phone-free policies at the local and state level.
- The PFSM Community Platform (Circle) — A collaborative national network where administrators, legislators, and advocates share best practices, troubleshoot implementation challenges, and learn from one another in real time.
- Webinars and Live Training Sessions — Regularly hosted conversations featuring school leaders, researchers, and practitioners who have successfully implemented bell-to-bell policies, offering practical insights and implementation lessons.
- Research and White Papers — Data-driven resources synthesizing national surveys, educator perspectives, and emerging research to support evidence-based policymaking.

Together, these tools ensure that schools are not simply passing policies — they are implementing them thoughtfully, sustainably, and successfully.

Why a Bell-to-Bell Approach Matters

Partial restrictions (e.g., limiting use only during instruction) still allow phones in hallways, cafeterias, and common spaces, which perpetuates distraction and inconsistent enforcement. A comprehensive bell-to-bell policy gives educators clear and consistent expectations, reduces ambiguity, and supports a school culture focused on full engagement with learning and peers.

Alignment With Maine's Goals

Maine has a strong tradition of prioritizing both academic excellence and student wellbeing. A bell-to-bell personal device ban:

- Supports executive functioning and sustained attention
- Reduces digital distraction during core instructional hours
- Reinforces meaningful social engagement among students
- Aligns with public health concerns raised by educators and parents

Given the national resurgence of interest in school phone bans — including state-level policies emerging in other states and internationally — Maine has an opportunity to lead a policy that prioritizes student health and learning.

Conclusion

We strongly support **LD 2212** and respectfully urge the committee to recognize the potential benefits of a comprehensive bell-to-bell phone/personal communication device ban for Maine's schools. This bill represents a meaningful step toward creating environments where students can focus deeply, connect authentically, and thrive academically and socially.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Mileva Repasky & Sabine Polak

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