

Good morning Senator, Representative, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

Bell-to-bell phone-free policies are not just educational and public health measures—they are a smart investment of taxpayer dollars. When students spend the school day on their phones, we are paying for instructional time that isn't fully used. Every hour lost to scrolling during the school day is a diminished return on public investment. If we want stronger outcomes without higher spending, **we must protect the learning time we already fund.**

To reap the full benefits of a bell-to-bell policy, phones must be truly inaccessible.

Research shows that devices do not even need to be in use to impair cognition. In a widely cited study, participants were asked to complete memory and problem-solving tasks under three conditions: their phones were left in another room, kept in a pocket or bag, or placed face-down on the desk. Performance declined as the phone got closer—even when it was powered off. Participants performed best when their phones were out of the room and worst when the phone was visible on the desk.

The conclusion is clear: simply having a phone nearby drains cognitive capacity. A portion of the brain remains attuned to the possibility of notification, message, or reward. This low-level cognitive load reduces working memory and problem-solving ability. For students—whose brains are still developing—this effect is even more consequential.

Silencing a phone is not enough. Keeping it in a backpack is not enough. If the goal is improved focus, memory consolidation, and academic performance, devices must be stored and inaccessible during the school day.

From a budget perspective, this matters. Maine's 2024 results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress show significant academic decline. Before we invest in costly new interventions, we should address the preventable drain on attention happening in every classroom, every day.

Bell-to-bell policies are also cost-effective. The expense of secure storage solutions is modest compared to the long-term costs of declining academic performance, remediation, and reduced workforce readiness. **Attention is foundational to learning. If we allow constant digital distraction, we undermine every other educational investment we make.**

Bell-to-bell phone-free policies are evidence-based, fiscally responsible, and aligned with Maine's goal of improving educational outcomes.

I urge you to support funding and implementation of strong, clear, and enforceable bell-to-bell phone-free school policies. Protecting attention protects learning—and protecting learning protects Maine's future.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

