

Chelsea DeLorme
Testifying in support of LD 2212, Part GG

Hello esteemed members of the Appropriations and Education Committees,

My name is Chelsea DeLorme and I'm testifying in support of section GG, what we parent advocates refer to as Phone-Free Schools for ME.

I'm also testifying in support of Maine students, educators, parents and our collective future. As well as in support of our Education Committee, for raising the volume on this conversation in our state and making it more informed. Final thank you to the school boards who saw the light early and have put time into this issue already.

For context: I'm a parent who holds tech boundaries with my kids, as hard as that is given the culture we're in. I have a 7th grade daughter who doesn't have a smartphone or social media, a third grade son who doesn't have a PS5 or YouTube access, and a 4 year-old who questions her crayons when she sees kids her age—or younger—on iPads in restaurants.

I'm also one of legions of parents radicalized by the book *Anxious Generation*, a cofounder of Turn the Tide Coalition and Landline Kids. My personal epiphany in reading "Anxious Generation" was that the moniker doesn't refer to our kids, it refers to us, their parents. Anxious often for good reason, with bad results.

Our kids are the Avoidance Generation. Avoidance is how anxiety shows up through behavior. Avoidance is easy. Avoidance is convenient. Avoidance is comfortable. And avoidance is not a healthy habit for adults to accommodate.

Because avoidance is the opposite of learning. And a lifetime of avoidance isn't life at all.

Friction is inherent to learning, whether that learning is in math class, the hallway, or in the cafeteria—academic, emotional or social. Our kids need support to face friction. Many of them want it.

Too often high schoolers have been asked: *Do you support a bell-to-bell ban during the school day?* when that is NOT the question. The real question is: *If none of your classmates had a phone during the school day would you be OK without one too?* (The answer is: They would be. They are.)

We are currently in a collective action trap of our own creation and parents need schools to help get us out. The research base has caught up with common sense and across the past year it has become common knowledge: Phone bans are healthy for all of us. Full stop.

At this point, when people push back on phone bans it gives you good info. They are either: a paid lobbyist, afraid of something they can't or won't name, or they're simply uninformed. Which is OK! There is a lot to care about in this world and we need to rely on others to do the work

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sometimes—you all are familiar with this phenomenon as legislators! But we have those experts—both local and national—and they're in your packet.

It is not a panacea to give students a 6-7 hour break from phones at school, but it *is* an incredibly cost-effective, rapid intervention that positively affects individual students and school communities. As good for teachers—and *parents*—as it is for students and importantly: *Most* impactful for students struggling to reach their full potential.

To simplify the issue: Phones are social media. Social media is phones. If you're following the trials in the Northern District of California—these products were designed by companies like Meta to be addictive. Of course we already knew that! But now we know that these companies knew it too—and *they know we know they knew*. Which changes everything. Anytime someone argues for having a phone during the school day or creating an exception beyond a 504, IEP or medically prescribed use, replace the word *phone* with *social media* and see how that sounds.

*[Last week, I had the chance to speak with an extraordinary educator, Prof. Jonathan Haidt himself. He had just returned from a European tour where he'd been prepared to pitch European leaders to follow Australia's lead and ban social media for 16-and-unders. To Prof. Haidt's delight he found that Europe was already there: No one needed convincing.]

If we want to keep up with the rest of the world, this is what we need to do for our kids, today.]

To wrap up: This IS a generation-defining question. And to return to the theme of parental anxiety: School shootings scare me too. But no, I don't want my kids texting me in a time of crisis. I want them to be alert, I want them to listen to and trust their teacher. And I want them to already know how much they are loved every time they walk out of our porch door.

I want them to know that the invisible string that connects us is more important and powerful than a smartphone.

Thank you. I welcome any questions.

*this section was skipped in live testimony due to time constraint