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April 16, 2025

Testimony of Representative Kristi Mathieson presenting

LD 170, Resolve, Establishing a Pilot Program to Reduce Personal Electronic Device Distractions During the School Day

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable Members of Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Kristi Mathieson and I represent House District 151, Kittery. Thank you for your time today. It is my honor to present to you **LD 170, Resolve, Establishing a Pilot Program to Reduce Personal Electronic Device Distractions During the School Day.**

Veteran teachers are telling me students are more distracted in the classroom; they notice higher levels of anxiety, more bullying, and more students with increased feelings of isolation. Teachers tell me enforcement of cell phone policies are inconsistent and can be left to them at the class level, they tell me their jobs are much harder now than they used to be.

While there are benefits to responsible cell phone use, in many cases both smartphones and social media applications have proven harmful to school-aged children. This harm is not universal but it is widespread, affecting a large percentage of teenage and preteen children, harming their ability to focus, learn and socialize. Although studies on these effects are in their infancy, there is already well-documented harm, including memory loss, worsening of existing conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and addiction.¹

¹ Dependency on Smartphone Use and Its Association with Anxiety in Korea. Kyung Eun Lee, Si-Heon Kim, Tae-Yang Ha, Young-Myong Yoo, Jai-Jun Han, Jae-Hyuk Jung and Jae-Yeon Jang Public Health Reports (1974-) Vol. 131, No. 3 (MAY/JUNE 2016), pp. 411-419 (9 pages) Published By: Sage Publications, Inc.
Establishing Causality Dr. Brian Anderson- <https://info.umkc.edu/drbanderson/establishing-causality/>
The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness, Penguin Press, NY, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.669042>.

Here are some stats:

- In 2011, approximately 35% of Americans owned a smartphone. In 2023, that number has grown to 97%.²
- Teens spend nearly five hours per day on social media apps.³
- Rates of school loneliness have doubled since 2012.⁴
- Three plus hours per day on social media doubles the risk of poor mental health, including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety.⁵
- Adolescents who experience cyberbullying are more than four times as likely to report thoughts of suicide and attempts as those who don't.⁶
- 41% of teens with the highest social media usage rate their overall mental health as poor or very poor.⁷
- A National Education Association poll indicated 83% of teachers support an all day phone-free policy, 95% of teachers said anxiety and depression is a problem in public schools⁸, and 72% of high school teachers report cellphones are a major distraction in the classroom⁹.

Some studies have shown positive trends in schools with cell phone policies. A steep drop was seen in bullying – 46% of girls and 43% of boys – after smartphone bans were enacted,¹⁰ and students not using their phones during class were shown to write down 62% more information and score a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple choice test¹¹.

We need to help municipalities and schools implement and rollout policies that engage stakeholders, **including students**, to facilitate a smooth transition to a phone-free environment.

² Internet, smartphone and social media use. Many more people use the internet now compared to 20 years ago. Richard Wike, Laura Silver, Janell Fetterolf, Christine Huang, Sarah Austin, Laura Clacy, Sneha Gubbala. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/12/06/internet-smartphone-and-social-media-use-in-advanced-economies-2022/>
The History of the Smartphone. Ewan Macleod. <http://www.mobileindustryreview.com/2016/10/the-history-of-the-smartphone.html>

³ Teens are spending nearly 5 hours daily on social media. Here are the mental health outcomes. Tori Deangelis. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/04/teen-social-use-mental-health>

⁴ Worldwide increases in adolescent loneliness. Jean M Twenge, Jonathan Haidt, Andrew B Blake, Cooper McAllister, Hannah Lemon, Astrid Le Roy. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34294429/>

⁵ Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory (Executive Summary). <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-summary.pdf>

⁶ Cyberbullying linked with suicidal thoughts and attempts in young adolescents. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/cyberbullying-linked-suicidal-thoughts-attempts-young-adolescents>

⁷ Teens are spending nearly 5 hours daily on social media. Here are the mental health outcomes. Tori Deangelis. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/04/teen-social-use-mental-health>

⁸ NEA Member Polling Results: Social Media, Personal Devices, and Mental Health June 20, 2024. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/nea-member-polling-on-social-media-personal-devices-and-mental-health-june-20-2024.pdf>

⁹ The Mere Presence of a Cell Phone May be Distracting. Implications for Attention and Task Performance. Bill Thornton, Alyson Faires, Maija Robbins, Eric Rollins. Published Online: January 01, 2014 <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000216>

¹⁰ Smartphone Bans, Student Outcomes and Mental Health. Sara Abrahamsson February 2024. <https://openaccess.nhh.no/nhh-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/3119200/DP%2001.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹¹ The Impact of Mobile Phone Usage on Student Learning. Jeffrey H. Kuznekoff, Scott Titsworth. Pages 233-252 | Received 21 Aug 2012, Accepted 12 Jan 2013, Published online: 12 Feb 2013. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03634523.2013.76791>

We need effective policies, practical guidelines and successful implementation. The success of any phone-free policy relies on the fidelity of implementation and consistency of enforcement, without adding additional stress to teachers, students and schools.

LD 170 is an opt-in pilot program that will provide municipalities a method to access grant funds to implement an effective, evidence-based, bell-to-bell, phone-free policy. The program will include an evaluation on changes in school climate, student mental health, behavioral incidences, overall academic performance and teacher, student, administrator and other stakeholder perceptions on the effect of the cell phone policy. The Maine Education Policy Research Institute (within existing resources) will support the Department of Education (DOE) in developing an application form and evaluating the pilot program with a report back to the joint standing committee of jurisdiction.

In my six years in the Legislature it has been clear municipalities do not like unfunded mandates but they do welcome collaborative support from the state. This pilot program offers a collaborative approach that takes into consideration all the stakeholders' concerns. I have always felt the most effective policy relies on compromise and open communication. Only when we offer support to the schools, the municipalities and include students in the discussions are we going to create lasting solutions. I ask you to support LD 170 and welcome questions.