

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 1234

AN ACT TO BAN CELLULAR TELEPHONES FROM PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

April 16, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and esteemed members of the committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Eileen King, Deputy Executive Director of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 1234, An Act to Ban Cellular Telephones from Public School Classrooms.

School officials from across Maine support the goals of the bill's sponsor – to tackle the detrimental effects of technology and social media on the mental health of Maine youth. Teenagers now spend¹ an average of 3.5 hours a day on social media.

Across our state, school boards and superintendents recognize the need to address this problem to the best of their ability within our schools. Districts such as RSU 1 and RSU 38 are seeing early positive results from limiting cell phone use in schools: more student engagement and fewer behavioral challenges.

Local control is key. The needs of students are different in Cape Elizabeth, Lewiston and Houlton. Family and community concerns differ, as well: many students and families need a phone to plan out a ride home, communicate with a supervisor about an after-school job, or address medical needs. Some of our teens assume the role as a parent and need to check in with their younger siblings.

In addition, we also know of some educators who are using cell phones as important educational tools, allowing students to develop the technological skills to prepare them for their futures. School boards and superintendents must consider all of these factors and develop policies balancing those needs and limitations with potential effects on school climate and mental health.

L.D. 1234 ignores that local control and the important work that school districts are already undertaking around this issue. Imposing this mandate will not allow for community collaboration to tackle this challenge. It also does not recognize that a phone-free strategy may cost money – districts have reported the costs of purchasing lockable “pouches” for phone at tens of thousands of dollars initially, plus ongoing costs of a few thousand dollars per year.

¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/youth-mental-health/social-media/index.html>

Other states, from California to Alabama and Kentucky, are implementing² cell phone laws acknowledging the need for this local flexibility. Many have passed laws requiring districts adopt policies limiting cell phone use – but allowing districts to determine what those policies should look like. If you look at our attached survey of district policies, you will see that this customization is resulting in thoughtful decision-making that we believe should be respected in the development of any action in the legislature. For these reasons, we would ask you to reject L.D. 1234.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

² <https://www.ecs.org/cell-phone-use-in-schools/>

County	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	How long has this practice been in place?		
Androscoggin	Prohibited	must be stored in lockers during the day	Can use with teacher permission for educational purposes. Also can use at breakfast and lunch, not during class	we will be bring a new policy to the board this year that is much more restrictive		
Androscoggin	prohibited	prohibited, must stay in backpack and locker	prohibited in class, must be in cell photo daycare on the classroom door or in locker and/or bag silenced	MS and HS, has been practice for the last 5 years. heavy enforcement in the past 2 years		
Androscoggin/Kennebec	Devices kept off and in lockers/backpacks during day	Devices kept off and in lockers/backpacks during day	Prohibited during Instrutlional Time	HS starting this year		
Aroostook	not allowed, must be kept in locker or with teacher	not allowed, must be kept in locker or with teacher	not allowed in class, teacher collects, may be used between classes,lunch, before and after school	New this year.		
Aroostook	Prohibited use all day	Prohibited use all day	Prohibited use all day	10+ years.		
Aroostook	Prohibited unless allowed by teacher. Must remain in back pack or with teacher.	not allowed in class, teacher collects, may be used at lunch, before and after school		10+ years		
Aroostook	Prohibited use all day.	Can use with teacher permission for educational purposes. Also can use at breakfast and lunch, not during class	Can use with teacher permission for educational purposes. Also can use at breakfast and lunch, not during class	New this year.		
Aroostook	Prohibited use all day	Can use at breakfast and lunch, not during class	Can use at breakfast and lunch, not during class	10+ years		
Aroostook	Prohibited Use	Prohibited Use	Can use at breakfast and lunch	10+ years		
Aroostook	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	This will be year 2		
Aroostook	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited during instructional time and in hallways except before school, after school and during lunch.	This will be year 3		
Aroostook	Electronic devices must be turned off and kept in student's locker or backpack during the duration of the school day.	Electronic devices must be turned off and kept in student's locker or backpack during the duration of the school day.	Students are expected to keep all cell phones, iPods, Kindles, Apple watches, and other electronic devices turned off and away during classes, including study halls. Students may appropriately use electronic devices before school, after school, in between class blocks and during lunch.	5+ years		
Aroostook	Prohibited, some parents send for use on the bus ride home.	Grade 3-6 School is must have in locker or book bag, no access during day. Grades 7-8 MS is Backpacks and lockers all day, no access at lunch or recess	High School can keep on person, no access during class, may use during lunch and passing time.	10 years since electronic device policy was in place		
Aroostook, Washington,	Prohibited use	Prohibited		10+ years		
Cumberland	Prohibited during the school day/can use on bus with headphones	Prohibited during the school day/can use on bus with headphones	Prohibited during class; can use during lunch or between clases	High School - New this Year		

Cumberland	Prohibited during the school day	Prohibited during the school day/can use on bus with headphones	Prohibited during the school day/can use on bus with headphones	2 years		
Cumberland	Prohibited	Devices should be stored appropriately. School day use is prohibited.	Devices can only be used during passing times, lunch, and when approved by a teacher during specified breaks in class or for instructional purposes.	ES: Multiple years; MS: one year; HS: New specific guidelines this year.		
Franklin	Prohibited	Prohibited	High school can use then during break and lunch only.	3 years		
Hancock	Prohibited Use all day. Can come to school but must remain off in backpack in hall cubby	Cell phones are turned off and stored in homeroom collection boxes entire school day. Can be used after school hours or by permission of the teacher.	Can use at breakfast and lunch, not during class. Working on a plan to prohibit them for next year.	10+ years		
Kennebec	Prohibited use all day.	Can only use with teacher permission for educational purposes, as well as during breakfast and lunch.	Can use with teacher permission for educational purposes, as well as at breakfast, lunch and during passing times.	? - This year the Board is going to study the research relating to the use of cell phones in schools to determine whether to further restrict cell phones at school during the school day.		
Kennebec	Prohibited	Prohibited during Instructional Time	Prohibited during Instructional Time			
Kennebec			N/A			
Kennebec	Prohibited	Devices stored and left in storage for day until dismissal.	Link to full high school document: https://mpaprof.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Cell-phone-policy-at-Maranacook-1.0-23-24-school-year.pdf	Elementary & Middle school for at least 7 years - high school updated in School Year 2024		
Knox	Prohibited/backpack or cubby	Working on a plan	Working on a plan	New discussion based on the disruption caused by use		
Knox	Prohibited/backpack or cubby	Prohibited/ backpack or locker		1		
Knox	prohibited	prohibited, must stay in backpack and locker	Allowed, some teachers ask to put in holder during class. Considering prohibition next school year (lock bags or something)	At least 10 years.		
Knox/Lincoln	Prohibited, unless staff member authorizes use	Prohibited, unless staff member authorizes use	Students in grades 9-12 may use privately owned electronic devices between class periods and during lunch periods.	2019	JFCK - Student Use of Privately-Owned Electronic Devices at School	JFCK-R - Student Use of Privately-Owned Electronic Devices at School Procedure
Lincoln	Devices kept off and in lockers/backpacks during day	Devices kept off and in lockers/backpacks during day	NA	modified this year		
Oxford	Not allowed	NA	NA			
Oxford	Prohibited use all day	Prohibited during the school day.	The use of cell phones and other personal electronic devices is only authorized during passing time, all lunches, and study halls except for health, safety, or ed purposes	HS - more restrictive practices - new this year; Elem/MS - 10+ years.		
Oxford	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited during instructional time. Allowed during passing times and lunch.	This will be year 2.		

Oxford	Devices stored and left in storage for day until dismissal.	Devices stored and left in storage for day until dismissal.	N/A	This will be the second year.		
Penobscot	Prohibited unless allowed by teacher. Must remain in back pack or with teacher.	Cell phones are turned off and stored in homeroom lock boxes entire school day.	Cell phones are stored in lock boxes during each class, but students pick them up/carry between classes.	Lock boxes new this year. Policy has been generally restrictive, and up to building principals to write procedures. In recent years, have become more and more restrictive.		
Penobscot	Prohibited use all day	Prohibited use all day, limited use during extra curricular activities	Prohibited use all day, limited use during extra curriculars	The policy has always prohibited use except with adult permission. We have been very lax on this and allowed students to use them between classes, lunch, and "down time". We are moving to enforcing a completely cell phone free school day when we open next week.		
Penobscot	No cell phones are used at this level.	Prohibited during the school day.	Phone tree organizers in every room; mandatory for students to turn off phone and place into the organizer until the bell sounds to end the class.	High School - New this Year		
Penobscot	Prohibited unless allowed by teacher.	Prohibited unless allowed by teacher.	Prohibited unless allowed by teacher.	Policy has been in place at least 8 years, but has not been enforced.		
Piscataquis	Prohibited use all day—backpack	Prohibited use all day —backpack/locker	Prohibited use all day —backpack or locker	This is year 2		
Sagadahoc	Can only use with the approval of administration for specific educational, health, or safety purpose.	Can only use with the approval of administration for specific educational, health, or safety purpose.	Can only use with the approval of administration for specific educational, health, or safety purpose.	The school board adopted this policy in August, 2024.		
Sagadahoc	prohibited - must remain in backpack during school day and while on bus	n/a	n/a	10+ years		
Somerset		Cell Phones & Smart Watches Stay in lockers till the end of the day ! Consequence: 1st warning, get it at the end of the day 2nd time Phone call home to parents, get it at end of the day. 3rd Time Phone call home, parent has to come to school and pick it up.		10+ Years		
Waldo	no policy yet	Going to be placed in a homeroom lock box for entire class for the day	Allowed currently	MS this will be the first year		
Washington/Arrostock	Prohibited use all day	Can use at breakfast and lunch, not during class	Can use at breakfast and lunch, not during clas	10+ years		

York	No cell phones are used at this level.	must be stored in lockers during the day	No cell phones during instructional time, stored in Cell Phone Cottages!			
York/ Cumberland	Discouraged/ off and in backpack if parent insists for safety at bus stop or afterschool	Must be off and put away, upon entering the building for the day and until exiting the building for the day. Not allowed to be carried on the student's person	1. Student cellphones and other personal electronic devices must be silent and out-of-sight during instructional time. (Cell phones may be used during lunches and between classes.) 2. Teachers may confiscate cell phones from students who violate this rule. 3. Cell phone violations may also result in additional consequences from administration.	10+ years		
Franklin	Not allowed	Must be kept in locker. Not allowed to be used in class or the school day	Policy states no with one exception, teacher discretion. Are allowing during lunch and between classes. Three warnings reach different levels of disciplinary action around confiscation etc.			
Franklin	Not allowed		1. During Class Hours: Phones must remain off and stored in lockers, backpacks, or designated areas. They are not to be used or carried on a student's person during class time unless explicitly permitted by a teacher for educational purposes. 2. Breaks and Lunchtime: Students may use their phones during designated break times, including lunch. However, usage should be respectful and not disrupt the school environment. 3. Emergencies: In case of an emergency, students will have access to their phones as needed. Alternatively, parents can contact the main office if they need to reach their child urgently. 4. Misuse and Consequences: Any misuse of phones during class time will result in confiscation and may lead to further disciplinary action as outlined in our school's code of conduct. For example, a 2nd time that the phone needs to be addressed, an after school detention will be assigned.	Revised for the start of the 24/25 school year		
Somerset	Not Allowed	Same as High School	Phones are only allowed during passing time, at lunch, and before or after school. Students are not permitted to use phones at other times of the day, including study hall, without permission.	Prior to 2024-25 the practice allowed for cell phone use during study hall. That approach existed since pre-pandemic.		
Sagadahoc	Not Allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	This is our first year of using the Yondr pouches for grades 6-12.		