

Good afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent of Senate Bill 158, which seeks to prohibit cellular telephone use in public schools. I am Dr. David Glasner, Superintendent of the Shaker Heights City School District.

Last year in Shaker Heights, a vast majority of teachers, administrators, parents – as well as a majority of students – agreed that the use of cell phones by students during school hours was a distraction in the classroom, cafeteria and hallways.

Most agreed that cell phones had a negative impact on school climate and safety. Many referred to the use of cell phones as an addiction that should be treated as a mental health issue rather than a disciplinary issue. We saw that cell phones had a negative impact on our teachers' ability to teach and our students' ability to learn.

As a result, the 2024-2025 school year marked the start of a new policy dramatically restricting the use of cell phones by students. Its aim: enhance the well-being of students, foster educational engagement, reduce distractions and promote a focused and safe learning environment.

The District's policy states the following:

- Preschool-Grade 5: Cell phones and wearables (such as earbuds and Apple watches) must be turned off and stored in backpacks from the arrival to dismissal.
- Grades 6-12: Cell phones and wearables must be turned off and stored in the student's assigned Yondr bag from the arrival to dismissal. The bag is sealed by a magnet that cannot be opened until the school day concludes.
- Exceptions to this policy may be granted by the school administration on a case-by-case basis for health-related reasons, special educational needs or other significant circumstances.

This policy was the product of months of research and discussion among a broad range of stakeholder groups. In early 2024, the district convened a districtwide committee and committees at both Shaker Heights Middle School and Shaker Heights High School to explore ideas and

gather stakeholder feedback about the use of mobile devices in schools. That effort included staff, administrators and parents from both the high school and middle school.

Their work included visiting multiple school districts where cell phone restrictions had been implemented, and meeting with experts from the medical, mental health and legal fields to review the latest research and implications around cell phones in school.

The district also conducted a survey that was sent to all staff, families and students in Grades 3-12. Some 3,000 individuals responded.

The results? About 85 percent of the families responding favored cell phone restrictions during the school day. About 92 percent of teachers favored such restrictions, as did 51 percent of support staff such as bus drivers, paraprofessionals and administrative assistants. Significantly, about 60 percent of students responding to the survey agreed that something should be done.

While it is perhaps too soon to share quantitative data tied to our new cell phone policy, as we approach the end of this first cell-phone free school year, we strongly believe that our cell phone policy has been successful.

Students are more engaged in the classroom, and more likely to engage with one another in the cafeteria. Teachers and families are grateful.

Our students still have access to their Chromebooks for classroom assignments that require them to use the internet. We have also found that in the event of an emergency, cell phones can be more of a hindrance than a help. School safety experts agree that in an emergency, students should be listening and following the directions of trusted adults in the building, rather than texting or taking photographs. In cases of emergency, we direct families to school-issued and authorized communications. We also have regular phones in each of our buildings and classrooms and families can contact their students via our school main office at any time.

It is worth noting that our cell phone policy is not cost-free. Please consider assisting districts financially to help defray the cost of Yondr bags, additional staffing and other expenses district may experience.

There are many things that we, as public school educators, cannot control outside of school. However, we can and should positively influence what takes place during the school day after students walk through our doors.

The Shaker Heights cell phone policy has been a success. I urge adoption of Senate Bill 158 to help ensure that all Ohio students have an opportunity to receive an education that is free from the distraction of cell phones and similar electronic devices.

Thank you.