

May 5th, 2025

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide opponent testimony on Senate Bill 158, prohibiting student cellular telephone use in public schools.

The sponsor of this bill makes the claim that banning cell phones is needed to "unplug our children". Our children are on laptops the entire school day, so you are not unplugging them from anything. If the legislature is concerned with screen time, maybe they should look into limiting the use of laptops.

Districts have already adopted cell phone policies. I don't quite understand why the legislature feels it needs to micromanage locally controlled districts. I also question the legality of banning cellphones in school. How do you legally ban private property on publicly owned property? The phone is the parents property and so is the school. Then we get into the gray area of confiscating/taking the phone from students. I know my district has been sued for confiscating phones illegally and in future I believe districts will face lawsuits for trying to confiscate private property.

Many proponents of this bill have made claims that during an emergency cell phones are a distraction and it is not necessary for phones to be accessible. Last year Vermilion City Schools had a Level 3 Lockdown, even though the district had been doing monthly drills, in a real life situation those drills did not matter. Kids ran out of the building into the woods, random cars, and even neighboring homes to flee to safety. Parents were pulling up and picking up car loads of children to get them to safety. Without access to their phones they would not have been able to contact their parents to pick them up or tell them where they were at.

Thankfully the lockdown was a false alarm, but it shows that in a real life situation the drills did not matter. So the claim that it is not necessary for students to have their phones in an emergency is asinine.

Cell phones also protect our children from inappropriate administrators who feel it is not necessary to contact parents before interrogating our children. Multiple times my children had requested I be called, and told no, until they used their cell phone to contact me as I had instructed them. Without their phone they would have had no way to contact us. My children also contact me for personal issues as well, like during COVID when the school was not providing water cups for their refill stations and they needed me to bring them water.

Cell phones have been in schools for over 20 years, smart phones have been in schools for over a decade. It is irresponsible to claim that having a phone in the classroom is causing academic issues. Having a phone in school and limiting personal use is good practice for a student's future in the workforce. They have to learn when and where it is appropriate to use the device.

Lastly, I find it troublesome that no ELECTED representative is co-sponsoring this legislation. Senator Jane Timken was not elected by the people, she was appointed by the governor, who is pushing for this legislation. This legislation cuts off parents' direct line of communication with their children and fosters mistrust with educators and the system as a whole; making parents feel that the schools are trying to hide something. Many have said they would consider pulling their kids out of school if this bill is passed and their districts adopt banning phones. Parents provide their child with a phone. I don't believe it is right for the schools or legislature to ban parents' direct line of communication with their child. Nor do I believe it is appropriate for the legislature to be making a law requiring a policy when schools are under LOCAL control. It feels like the General Assembly is trying to micromanage locally controlled districts.

I am asking this committee to not pass SB158, not to shove this legislation in the Budget Bill as discussed in this committee, to stand up for the rights of parents, and to not continue to make the schools feel like, as my children call it, "mini prisons". My children and I discussed SB158 on my podcast Mean Street News; I urge you all to check out that episode and hear their concerns regarding a cell phone ban. Thank you.

Best Regards,

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