

DATE: March 22, 2025

TO: Representative Wallen  
Representative Reynolds  
Representative Dobson  
Members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare

FROM: Jaime Peterson, MD, MPH

SUBJECT: Support for HB 2251 Student Smartphone Restrictions

My name is Dr. Jaime Peterson and I am a pediatrician, as well as a former middle school teacher. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 2251, which seeks to implement restrictions on smartphone usage for students during school hours in Oregon. As a healthcare provider deeply invested in the wellbeing of children and adolescents, and someone with firsthand experience in the classroom, I believe this bill is crucial for the mental health, academic success, and social development of our young people.

In recent years, smartphones and social media have become pervasive in the lives of children and adolescents. While technology can be a valuable tool for learning, there is growing concern about the negative impact that excessive screen time, especially through smartphones, can have on young people's health and wellbeing. The U.S. Surgeon General recently issued a warning regarding the dangers of smartphone and social media use for children and adolescents, particularly highlighting their association with increased rates of anxiety, depression, social isolation, and other mental health issues.

As a pediatrician, I see the effects of these concerns every day in my practice. I regularly see children who struggle with anxiety, depression, and poor sleep due to the constant presence of their smartphones. The pressure to stay connected, be active on social media, and constantly check for updates takes a significant toll on mental health. These devices, while designed to keep young people connected, can also isolate them, creating a paradox where they are more "connected" online but increasingly disconnected in real life. Parents want to intervene but feel pressure to keep their child connected with peers.

From my time as a teacher, I saw the introduction of cell phones initially for safety or communication with parents after school evolve into daily distractions. When I visit schools now I have seen students distracted by their phones during class, struggling to focus, and falling behind academically because of their inability to remain engaged in lessons. The constant distractions hinder the ability to process and retain information. Smartphones, when used excessively, also take away valuable opportunities for face-to-face interaction, which is essential for the development of social skills.

House Bill 2251 offers a necessary solution to this issue by restricting smartphone usage during school hours. This has been successful in other states and is underway in both private and

public schools in Oregon. I have patients who attend Portland Public Schools that have implemented restrictions with positive impacts; I hear relief from students that they are not constantly checking their phones or interrupted by texts or social media pings. This bill will allow students to focus on their studies, engage more meaningfully with their peers, and develop healthier habits around technology use.

The evidence supporting the harmful effects of excessive screen time and smartphone use is clear, and as a pediatrician and former educator, I can tell you that this bill addresses a real need. By limiting smartphone use in schools, we are giving students the chance to better focus on their academics, engage more meaningfully with their peers, and protect their mental health. We are also helping them learn to strike a better balance between the online world and the real world — a balance that will benefit them in the years to come.

I wholeheartedly support HB 2251 and urge you to consider its passage.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Jaime Peterson  
Portland, OR