

Submitter: Marlo McIlraith

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2251

Dear Chair Neron and House Committee on Education,

My name is Marlo McIlraith and I have been a pediatrician in the Beaverton/Portland area for the past 25 years. I am also a mom of three that were educated in the Beaverton district. I am writing in support of HB 2251. As a pediatrician, I have seen the consequences of cell phone use in kids and I believe that the high rates of behavioral dysregulation, poor social skills, anxiety and depression as well as struggles with academic performance are related to the overwhelming amount of time our kids spend on electronic devices. While there are some positives associated with technology and even social media, use during the school day distracts from the academic and social objectives that need to be met for students to be successful. I talk to many parents and students in my practice and hear from them that reading in particular takes a back seat when there are more "exciting" and entertaining options for engagement. I saw this in my own children as well and restricted their use of screens as much as possible (outside of chromebook use for school) until late middle school and high school. Focus during class time is clearly affected by access to phones according to my friends who are teachers. Even recess, passing times, and lunch times have less social engagement when kids are on their phones. I saw many children struggling with learning how to interact socially when their time with other kids was limited during early COVID restrictions. These struggles have continued even as schools opened back to in-person. I believe this is because more of these kids avoid social interactions in-person when they are distracted by their phones. I counsel families constantly about delaying access to cell phones until high school, mostly because it is easier to control the total amount of time spent on these devices. If they were prohibited during school time, bell to bell, I believe there would be a big impact on both academic progress and social skills. Emerging evidence from districts who have led the way in these restrictions are very promising. I believe that HB 2251 would be the push that districts need in order to make these restrictions in the face of parental resistance.

Sincerely,

Marlo McIlraith, MD
Associate Professor of Pediatrics, OHSU