

**Max Williams – Testimony in Support of HB 2251A
Supporting a Bell-to-Bell Ban on Cell Phones in Schools**

My name is Max Williams. I am former member of the House of Representatives, Director of Corrections, and CEO of the Oregon Community Foundation. I am also a father and grandfather. I offer this testimony in support of HB 2251A. Over the last year I have become increasingly familiar with the research on this issue, and the research strongly supports a "bell-to-bell" ban on student personal electronic devices. Let me share with you just three quick points:

1. While this is a "classroom and education" issue - it is also a teen mental health issue. I know many of you are familiar with the data that an increasing number of pre-teens and teens are suffering from depression, sadness, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation. The Surgeon General's advisory has specifically linked much of this rise in mental health risk for young people to electronic devices and social media. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>. Providing uninterrupted school time without the distraction and harmful effects of these devices and social media will benefit student's overall mental health.

2. The claim of requiring "local control" is one we hear often in Salem. Yet, there are numerous cases where the legislature, because of the risk and policy implications, chooses to prudently put in place statewide standards. For instance, school districts are not given the authority to decide on-campus student smoking policies, and certain instructional standards have regularly been mandated by the Legislature. **The best evidence suggests that a piece-meal policy that is less than a bell-to-bell restriction, produces little results, either in improved instructional outcomes or in reducing the risks of personal electronic devices in the school.** Allowing access during lunch periods and breaks doesn't address unwanted photos, social media posting, bullying, and distractions that are just as problematic and negatively impact student learning. The "local control" argument is frankly not supported by the data. If your goal is to protect teens and improve learning, there are really no policy reasons for arguing why one district should take one approach - and one another. **The state should dictate this policy.**

3. Education accountability is the watchword of the session. The demand for better outcomes and a more funding are the significant focus of this committee. I would ask that you consider **HB 2251 as a near zero cost approach to improving educational outcomes.** Supported broadly by teachers across the country - and in Oregon - this is an immediate policy action that the legislature can take that will improve educational outcomes. This has been substantiated in studies in other countries that have adopted such bans. See <https://openaccess.nhh.no/nhh-xmlui/handle/11250/3119200>, with similar findings in Spain and the UK. Similar data is emerging in other states and districts that have adopted such policies. **Instead of needing to spend tens of millions more to achieve possible education gains, this policy will produce near-term results at very little cost to the state school fund.**

I know that challenging "local control" is not always popular. I also know that even some parents feel the need to be in constant contact with their children. But many of us were raised at a time when such devices didn't exist. Yet, we went to school and managed to navigate the world, after school rides, dentist appointments, all without constant contact with our parents. Unfortunately, this need for constant contact is damaging for both parents and children - and has been perpetrated by big-tech to keep us addicted to technology.

All the evidence suggests that a bell-to-bell ban of cellphones in schools is the right policy choice if we want to get better student outcomes - and if we want to improve student mental health. Let's not leave that obvious policy choice up to districts who will be lobbied and manipulated by a few of the loudest voices.

Please refer House Bill 2251A to the floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

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