

Submitter:

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On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB2251

My name is Troy Theriot, and I have been an educator for 24 years in the Beaverton School District. I'm also a parent of two sons, ages 17 and 19, who are also products of the Beaverton School District. Besides chronic absenteeism, which has always been an issue, especially since the COVID pandemic, student access to smartphones has been the most damaging component to student success. Not only have smartphones contributed to academic failure for many students, but it has also completely changed the neurological, behavioral, and social make-up of children over the past decade. Research in the last few years has revealed these same noticings, but I can tell you from experience, many of today's students have fallen behind academically and socially because of the constant pull of the distraction that exists in their pockets. Because students are so used to these devices, their attention spans, ability to communicate, and reading abilities have suffered, just to name the most obvious consequences. They truly have a hard time developing creative and individual thought, as well as critical analysis. They are constantly filling the void of waiting time, boredom, stamina, and the struggle to problem solve with mindless scrolling through social media, YouTube videos, and video games. All of these distractions not only get in the way of their education, but they have also incredibly harmed their social and emotional well-being.

As a parent, my wife and I decided to wait to get smartphones for our own children until they were 14 years old. Although we got them a little sooner than that due to the pandemic, we purchased phones and communicated to our sons that access to their devices would be restricted to certain times of the day. Not only that, but we put a one-hour-per-day time limit on the time allowed overall for gaming, videos, etc. We only allowed our children to create Instagram accounts once they were in high school, since much of school and social communication occurs through that platform. This was also time-restricted. Although my children are not perfect by any means, it is startling how dramatic the differences are between them and the students I see daily. The problem is that very few parents wait for their children to become mature enough to handle the ability to use a smartphone, nor do they exert their parental guidance and utilize restrictions on these devices, which would prevent addiction and the feeling of powerlessness that they feel when confronting their children on overuse.

Ideally, I would love to see future legislation on the regulation of smartphone purchases for children, especially under the age of 14. It is sad to see parents putting this technology in the hands of children at such an early age. I guess that's an argument for another day. In the meantime, HB2251 is an attempt to remove access in schools to devices that we know are extremely harmful to children. We need to treat these devices and attack their usage like we have done with harmful

vices like vaping, smoking, and other habitual poisons. We must act now. Other states have already banned smartphones in their schools, and Oregon school districts need the push from lawmakers, because I feel that they don't have the courage to do it on their own. I don't mean to be hyperbolic, but this issue is one of the most important for the future of productive and healthy citizens. As an educator, parent, and extremely concerned Oregonian, I urge the passing of HB2251.