

Submitter: Natalie Houston

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2251

Chair Frederick, Vice-chair Weber and members of the committee, thank you for your attention to this issue. My name is Natalie Houston, I am a clinical mental health therapist from Bend. I am here today to urge you to vote YES on HB2251.

I have been working with children, adolescents and adults for 15 years. Over the past year, I have been speaking in schools on the topic of digital devices and youth mental health and I am a member of the Bend La Pine School District Technology Stakeholder committee.

In my practice I am seeing increasing numbers of youth and families seeking services related to problematic and excessive use of phones and social media: depression, anxiety, avoidance, panic disorder, sleep problems, self harm and worse. I see teens who cannot sit through the length of a standard counseling session without checking their phones or becoming visibly agitated and anxious when they can't.

These devices and apps are literally changing the neurology, behavior, attention and motivation systems of children and adolescents. As a result, we are now seeing new diagnostic categories, such as "internet use disorder" and "gaming disorder" and internet addiction treatment centers opening across the globe.

This is heartbreaking and a wake-up call for us all.

Even when they initially protest responsible limits on phone use (and believe me, if this bill is passed, they will), deep down children and teens experience a sense of relief to be freed from the pull of phones and social media platforms, something they often disclose to their therapist but seldom to others.

Kids need real life experiences with face to face interaction and rich learning environments, free from pings, notifications, and distractions. Most of all, they need educational spaces where they can take risks and make mistakes without fear of being recorded and cyber-bullied.

If we want to provide students with a learning environment that maximizes educational development, promotes better mental health outcomes, and equips students with the skills needed for life, we need to give students 6 to 8 hour blocks of time every day – in schools – without the distractions of personal electronic devices.

Let's give our schools the direction and support they need to create this environment

for all of Oregon's school children: vote yes on HB2251.