

Testimony on HB 2251

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Thank you, Chairman Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify on HB 2251. My name is Dr. John Mootz, and I serve as the Senior Policy and Research Manager at Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development, a leading national nonprofit dedicated to advancing research and education on how digital media affects young people. I'm also a proud Portland, Oregon resident who cares deeply about the future of our state's children and schools.

Educators and administrators report widespread problems associated with smartphones (and other internet-connected devices) in schools. Research has shown that such devices distract students, disrupt teaching environments, drain school resources, and impair student functioning.

School smart device bans are still nascent, but early studies find removing phones from schools can actually provide modest improvements to academic performance and student wellbeing, especially for the lowest performing students.

In jurisdictions with school phone bans, educators observe benefits to students, and for teachers themselves. For instance, educators and administrators in Australian states with public school phone bans report improved learning, fewer distractions in the classroom, less staff time spent dealing with issues regarding phones, and greater engagement during instructional time

There's ample evidence to support Oregon students and teachers as they embark on school phone policy change with an eye toward improved student outcomes.

I cannot go so far as to say that school phone bans will solve all our education problems. But they can offer students a critical reprieve from digital distractions, curb cyberbullying, reduce exposure to harmful content, encourage in-person social interaction, and help restore schools as focused learning environments.

As we consider these policies, it's also important to collect and evaluate data that can inform best practices. I urge the Committee to ensure implementation is paired with monitoring in key areas:

- Compliance: Are schools adopting and enforcing the policy as intended?
- Primary outcomes: Are students actually using phones less during school hours?
- Secondary outcomes: How are academic performance, student well-being, classroom focus, and school climate affected?

With thoughtful implementation and data-informed adjustments, smart device policies have the potential to meaningfully improve the learning environment for Oregon's students and educators.

Thank you again for your time.

