

Submitter: Kayla Rotunno

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2251

Hello Chair and Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my testimony today. My name is Kayla Rotunno. I live in Sunriver, Oregon and I am here in support of HB 2251.

I was on the Teams call today, waiting 1.5 hours for a chance to speak. Listening to others testify, I heard doctors and teachers and mental health experts explaining the clear, urgent, and VITAL need to take decisive action on this issue. I also heard a handful of people hemming and hawing: ‘Our district wants to personalize the process, every district is different, etc.’ They’re right – districts are different and represent diverse populations – but not in any way that has to do with how distracting and damaging phones are. No matter a person’s background, no matter a person’s culture - corporations in pursuit of profit are hijacking all of us and our time, our ability to focus and learn, and most importantly - our emotional wellbeing.

The consequences to youth mental health are too dire, we cannot wait because the distractibility of personal devices knows no bounds. All of us are becoming increasingly addicted to screens and losing our ability to focus and connect in a meaningful way. If this is afflicting you too – be honest with yourself – I highly recommend the book “Stolen Focus” by Johann Hari. He will explain why (when you look up from your phone), you see that everyone around you is looking at their phones, too.

I am a mom of a four year old girl named Reese and a six year old boy named Boden and I am horrified looking ahead at the mental health epidemic among young people today. I love this state and feel so lucky to be raising my little forest school attending, nature loving, stick fort building, wild child kids here. I shouldn’t have to look ahead and dread what is coming for them. I shouldn’t have to feel scared about how middle/high school will change them and hurt them. But I do, and based on the outcomes for kids in Oregon right now, my fears are warranted.

We MUST act in the best interest of our state’s children. We MUST take a stand against the devices and companies that seek to control them. I STRONGLY URGE you to support this bill.

There are many smart people in this room and not one of us had a device designed to distract us on our person while in school. Being a teen was already hard when we were doing it. Why would we make that tumultuous time EVEN harder on our kids?

Children obviously need a learning environment in which they can connect with their teachers and classmates in person, without the distraction of cell phones that get in the way of learning and create social conflict, attention problems, and emotional turmoil. We wouldn't open a toy store in the corner of an elementary classroom. We wouldn't roll in tvs and play movies while a teacher is at the front of the class, attempting to teach middle schoolers. We wouldn't bring in a couch full of friends and video game consoles and plop them down next to a high school kid studying geometry. So why are we allowing these massive distractions in our classrooms??

I honestly cannot understand why anyone would oppose this bill given the gravity of this situation. This is NOT about student conduct as the opposition stated today. This is about allowing a product into our schools that harms students. I guarantee we will look back on this debate in 10 or 20 years and realize that this uncertainty and wavering back and forth that we're doing today is absurd.

The future of our children and our communities is at risk - we need young people to thrive and it's clear that phones directly prevent their ability to do so. We MUST get devices out of classrooms.

You can IMMEDIATELY IMPROVE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS. PLEASE vote yes, protect kids, and advance this forward as soon as possible.

Thank you,
Kayla Rotunno