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OREGON STATE SENATE

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Senate Committee on Education
Hearing Room B

Good morning, Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee.

I'm very grateful for this opportunity – for this public hearing on HB 2251, creating cell phone free schools. I am Lisa Reynolds, state senator and pediatrician. You all know the statistics of Oregon's dismal academic ratings and our troubling youth mental health status. We are 49th in the state.

You have heard the success rates on these parameters - and more!- When schools go cell phone free. I am here as a trained professional - and your colleague - to tell you that HB 2251 will truly move the needle on our youth's mental health, on their ability to focus, and on their ability to engage with other humans.

You know, as a physician in this building, I get pinged a lot or pulled aside.

Lisa, I want to ask you about a side effect my medication is causing. Lisa, please come to my office urgently for a medical incident. Lisa, is my kid's fever/rash/abdominal pain something to worry about? Lisa, my sister-in-law, is having pregnancy complications. Can I ask you about that? Lisa, I think my daughter is depressed. What should I do?

I come when beckoned, I pick up the phone when colleagues or staff call, I look at photos of rashes, I call adolescents directly, I recommend specialists, and I review lab results. And it's an honor and a privilege to be trusted with your very personal concerns and yes - your fears. **So I ask this of you. Please trust me on this.**

When we are not in session, I spend two and a half days a week as a pediatrician in exam rooms, sitting across from families and, yes, adolescents. This summer will mark 30 years of this incredibly rewarding work. And let me tell you, the kids are not all right.

I sit with an adolescent, who is SEEKING me out for advice, and I see their eyes flicker toward their buzzing phone - remember - an average of about 250 notifications a day come to our youths' phones. They cannot attend our 15-minute discussion. I don't know how this possibly works in the classroom.

A recent study out of Seattle reveals that students spend an average of 1.5 hours out of the 6.5-hour school day on their phones.¹ A quarter of students spend more than 2 hours on their phone during the school day. The most used apps? Messaging, Instagram, video streaming, audio, and email.

¹ Dimitri A. Christakis et al., "Adolescent Smartphone Use during School Hours," *JAMA Pediatrics* 179, no. 4 (April 1, 2025): 475–78, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.6627>.

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1.5 hours in a school day on one's cell phone? This is the equivalent of 35 school days a year of wasted educational time. SEVEN weeks. That's pretty costly! And I don't even mean the dollar amount, but that would be interesting math. And when I think of all of the work we are doing on school absenteeism, we must consider this erasure of instructional opportunity a version of absenteeism.

Furthermore, I've helped families navigate cyberbullying, including a few instances where kids transferred SCHOOLS in the fallout.

You know, I remember the smoking lounge in my high school. I'm that old. The SMOKING LOUNGE. And I remember seeing my brother out there in the smoking area when he was a senior.

Of course, over the years, we saw fit to shut down high school smoking lounges. We made the assessment that the impact on students' health, the co-dependence of the school enabling youth smoking and nicotine addiction, far outweighed any reason to offer this privilege to students.

My brother remains addicted to cigarettes, and it was his youthful exposure that locked it all in for him.

Let's not be complicit with the addiction to social media. Let's no longer turn a blind eye to the serious damage that cell phone content is wreaking on our youth. Let's help our students thrive and our schools climb out of the academic and mental health holes we are in.

So, what I ask of you - is that if you trust me with your or your family's personal health issues, please trust me with this professional expertise. HB 2251 may not be what all of our schools "get" or what our individual districts have the strength to do. I'm hearing some pushback on this bill about the importance of local control.

But let's be honest, we make a lot of statewide decisions on education in this building, whether it's parameters on book bans, on curriculum for civics and the holocaust, on graduation requirements, even a bill that I brought forward last year on how IB curriculum is handled.

As legislators, we see the statewide patterns, we seek the counsel of professionals, and there are times (many times!) when local control is not the right choice.

And in this case, I argue, please listen to those of us on the ground, with these young people. They need us to do the right thing by them.

Please support this bill. The health and the academic growth of our kids demand it.

We do our best, and when we know better, we do better.

"Due to recent research regarding adolescence cell phone use, the Oregon Department of Education recommends that schools and districts review and update their policies related to cell phone and mobile device use during the school day to limit or restrict the use of them."

- **Fostering Student Learning, Well-Being, and Belonging Guidance for School Cell Phone Policies October 2024**

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