

Submitter: Yessica Hardin Mercado
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2251

Testimony in Opposition to HB 2251

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Yessica Hardin Mercado. I'm a former classroom teacher, a small business owner, and a parent in Oregon. I've spent years supporting students, families, and educators and I care deeply about policies that actually help them thrive.

I understand the motivation behind HB 2251. Phones can be a challenge in classrooms. There are valid concerns about distraction, safety, and mental health. But this bill takes local decision-making away from the people who know students best—their communities, educators, and school boards, It replaces it with a one-size-fits-all mandate that doesn't reflect the real complexity of the issue.

As a teacher, I've had to manage phone use in the classroom. I've seen it be a distraction, but I've also seen it be a lifeline. I had a student who was going through a rough time at home. His grandma was worried he was skipping school, so I let him send her a picture during the day and even FaceTime her during lunch, just to give her peace of mind. That moment built trust. It didn't take away from learning, it actually created more space for it.

Another time, a student captured a video of a fight that broke out on campus. That video helped identify the person responsible and protected another student from being wrongly disciplined. Without it, the wrong student may have faced serious consequences.

And I'll never forget a student who was dealing with suicidal thoughts. Part of supporting them was making sure they knew how to reach out for help, including texting the suicide prevention helpline from their phone. That small act, normalizing support, mattered.

These stories are not exceptions. They're reminders that phones, like any tool, can be misused, but they can also be used with care, purpose, and humanity.

Banning phones outright doesn't teach students anything. Schools should be places where young people learn to navigate the real world, not avoid it. We don't ban pencils because someone doodles. We didn't ban laptops when they were new, we

taught students how to use them wisely. Phones should be treated the same way.

According to Common Sense Media's latest report, how kids use smartphones varies widely depending on their environment. That means our solutions need to be flexible, not rigid. Local districts should be the ones shaping policies, based on their students, their families, and their staff, not mandates from the state.

We should be building school cultures where expectations are clear, where students understand the "why" behind policies, and where teachers are given the resources to integrate technology into learning. This isn't about ignoring the problem, it's about choosing a more thoughtful and effective way to address it.

I urge you to oppose HB 2251. Instead, let's support local solutions, invest in professional development, and prioritize equity and understanding. Let's create schools that are built on trust, not control.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,
Yessica Hardin Mercado