



MEMORANDUM

To: Sen. Lew Frederick, Chair, Senate Education Committee
Sen. Suzanne Weber, Vice-Chair, Senate Education Committee
Members of the Senate Education Committee

From: Bryan Boehringer, Executive Vice President, Oregon Medical Association

Date: May 12, 2025

Re: OMA support for HB 2251-A – Cell Phone-Free Classrooms

The **Oregon Medical Association (OMA)** represents and advocates for more than 7,000 physicians, physician associates, and medical and PA students across Oregon. Our mission is to support our members in their efforts to practice medicine effectively, improve the health of Oregonians, and provide the highest quality patient care.

HB 2251-A is an important public health tool that will help schools implement phone-free classrooms with reasonable student use exceptions. There is growing concern that cell phone use and more specifically, social media use, correlates with adverse impacts on mental health, particularly in younger students. Reports and ongoing research have found that the use of social networking sites is associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. The U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health considers this an urgent public health issue requiring immediate awareness and action.¹

Research continues to support the benefits of phone-free classrooms which can enhance academic performance, reduce distractions, and improve student mental health. Studies have shown that supporting a classroom and school environment without the distraction of phones leads to better test scores and decreased anxiety among students. Additionally, limiting phone use can decrease incidents of cyberbullying and promote healthier social interactions.

A state-supported policy that can lead to an improvement in academic performance, better student focus and concentration, increased student engagement, stronger social interactions among students and a reduction of classroom disruptions and distractions seems like good public policy. In fact, 72% of high school teachers have reported that students being distracted by their cell phones is a major

¹ Vivek Murthy, M.D., MBA, Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, p. 3, 2023.

problem in their classroom according to a Pew research survey of US public K-12 teachers in fall of 2023.²

Statewide directives to school districts should never be taken lightly, however pursuing rational public health goals is good cause for statewide policy. The need for the state to implement school smoking bans is a well cited example. While the data on cell phone use has been available for several years, not all school districts have considered policies or implemented effective policies to create phone-free classrooms. HB 2251-A would help school districts implement this policy. Additionally, the bill includes reasonable exceptions to allow students with individual needs who require access to devices to continue to use them.

For these reasons, the OMA supports HB 2251-A as a step that can help improve the health and wellbeing of our youth. Thank you for your time and consideration.

The Oregon Medical Association (OMA) is the state's largest professional organization engaging in advocacy, policy, community-building, and networking opportunities for Oregon's physicians, physician associates, medical students, and physician associate students. The OMA's members speak with one voice as they advocate for policies that improve access to quality patient care, reduce administrative burdens on medical professionals, and improve the health of all Oregonians. Additional information can be found at www.theOMA.org.

² Survey of U.S. public K-12 teachers conducted Oct. 17 – Nov. 14, 2023. What's It Like to Be a Teacher in America Today?"