

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5149 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS.

Vote Date: 3/16/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/20/2026

File No.: 407

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to limit the use of cell phones during the school day and prohibit school districts from using social media as the only means of communicating and providing information to families. The goal of this bill is to enhance classroom engagement, minimize in-class distractions, and protect students' mental health in public schools.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute (1) adds an exemption for devices used for a students' health and well-being and (2) eliminates a provision requiring that school board policies include a requirement that devices are inaccessible to students while stored.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut State Dept. of Education, Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, supports the spirit of this bill, but has some reservations regarding its wording. She prefers Governor's Proposed HB-5035, An Act Requiring School Districts to Ban Cellular Phones in the Classroom for three reasons. First, HB-5035 compared to this bill (HB-5149) has language to include restricting equipment that can take or transmit digital images during the school day. This language could include digital cameras, which the Commissioner believes should not be excluded from use in school. Second, this bill allows cell phones for IEPs and Section 504 plans. However, this bill does not extend the allowance of cell phones for instructional purposes outside of special education or health-related reasons, unlike HB-5035. Third, this bill, unlike HB-5035, fails to allow cell phone use for instructional purposes in general education. This poses a logistical and an inequity concern. Since not all schools have

the resources to provide devices to students, only local and regional boards of education are in the position to best outline policies for allowable cell phone use in the classroom for general education purposes.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

The following people support this bill for similar reasons. They believe that schools should be phone-free since phones do not provide value to students or teachers. Likewise, they believe phone-free schools do provide value to students and teachers. They generally believe children deserve a break from phones and the harms they cause, such as mental-health related issues like stress, anxiety, and loneliness. Other harms they list, or at least allude to, are lack of socialization, social skills, and ability to concentrate.

- **Anonymous 14**
- **Anonymous 31**
- **Anonymous 37**
- **Anonymous 46**
- **Dawn-Marie Callahan**
- **Kristin Celano**
- **Leigh Charron**
- **Therese Dykeman**
- **Sarah Dzialo**
- **Barbara Fairbanks**
- **Elly Fatehi**
- **Amanda Ingrassia**
- **Kelsey Hubbard**
- **Elizabeth Madison**
- **Meghann McKale**
- **Pastor William McCullough, Founder of Faith Acts for Education**
- **Sandra Ferreira-Molina**
- **Shawn O'Sullivan**
- **Julia Phillips, Co-founder of Madison Youth Unplugged**
- **Kathryn Reidy**
- **Louis Schede**
- **Bzu Shiferaw, Campaign Manager speaking for Fairplay**
- **Kristen Tirado**

Shannon Capocci supports this bill as a parent of three children. Phones have had monstrous detrimental effects to children's academic, social, and emotional development. She also argues that phones in schools is an equity issue, since more affluent communities know the harms and are enacting policy to curtail phone use. She also notes that accommodations and IEPs can be used in unique cases where a student does need a phone. So, the students who absolutely need a phone can still use one while the students who do not can instead focus on learning. She also notes that smoking is not allowed in schools anymore and draws similarities between smoking and phone use.

Connecticut Voices for Children (CT Voices) supports this bill based on a growing number of reports that highlight the negative impacts of phone use in schools. Receiving hundreds of notifications and messages throughout the day hurts children's mental health and well-being.

Research has also shown that countries who have removed phones in schools have improved learning outcomes.

Anonymous 33 supports this bill as a secondary teacher in Connecticut. They note how many bemoan the impact of COVID and argues that phones have had an even greater negative impact on students. Phones have also caused a strain on teachers and staff. Due to the addictive nature of phones, students are resisting certain phone-related policies. This person in support of this bill believes a state-wide initiative like this bill will provide a consistent phone policy that would help teachers and staff handle phones in school while also ensuring the students, who do not have the brain development to fight against phone-related distractions, get the phone-free education they deserve.

Anonymous, Anonymous supports this bill as both a professor and as a parent. This person supports legislation, which they believe would help high school students develop interpersonal skills. They saw how differently a class functions when students are too attached to their phones in-class. They also have experience raising their child with limitations on phone use. Since they have seen the benefits of technology and also its negative impacts, they are in support of this bill.

Beth Azeveda supports this bill because she believes in science data and the advice of experts. She also saw that 30% of high school students in a survey admitted that they spend 1-2 hours a day at school on their phones. Since Beth is against any use of phones in public schools and would like a bell-to-bell ban to allow kids to focus all of their time and attention on school during school hours, she supports this bill.

Rob Bibbiani supports this bill. Rob believes smartphones and social media have contributed to deficiencies in young people's anxiety, depression, and attentiveness. He believes that children deserve to go to school and learn without distraction from phones.

Leslie Blatteau, President of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, supports this bill because cell phones interrupt and interfere with teaching and learning. She believes that phones also interrupt and interfere with children's social development and the development of a vibrant school culture. Given her personal experience with an initiative that banned phones from high schools and middle schools, she believes that phone bans help all members of school communities in teaching, learning, and building community.

Jennifer Butler supports this bill as a school counselor who cares about the education and health of students. She believes that technology needs to have guardrails to allow students to benefit from technology without suffering any of its harms. Phones can impact the emotional health of students interrupt class time, such as when someone received a derogatory message in the middle of class, causing the student to feel hurt while also requiring the teacher taking class time to handle the situation. To protect students' social and mental health, Jennifer Butler believes policy like this bill is necessary.

The following people support this bill because science, data, and research have shown the negative effects of excessive screen use, such as decreased attention, increased anxiety, and delayed development of social skills.

- **Erin Drejer**
- **Emily Fernandez**

- **Megan Kelley**
- **Tara Kilkenny**
- **FOCUS (Fostering Optimal Connectivity, Understanding & Safety), a parent organization**
- **Brittany Riggio**
- **Ali Sise**
- **Kathleen Swec, MD, FAAP**

Kate Dias and Joslyn DeLancey, President and Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) support this bill. They note how science and research point to the harms of excessive phone use. They recommend that guidelines on phone use be made more clearly and that the process for developing policies be transparent. In order to assuage concerned parents who want to still reach their children in the case of an emergency, they recommend that the legislation should be more explicit, requiring that districts develop policies allowing for some other communication between parents and children during the school day. Finally, they note that as many as 35 other U.S. states have enacted legislation limiting phone use during instructional time. These states include New York, New Hampshire, Georgia, Virginia, Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, and Oregon.

Christopher Duberek supports this bill as a concerned student. He believes that his school's phone policy is fair, with everyone placing their phones in designated spots before class. Once class is over, students are granted access to phones during passing periods. This time allows students to catch up with parents and schedule rides for school activities while also limiting distracting during actual class time.

Lauren Efron supports this bill. Her oldest daughter was twice exposed to inappropriate videos as a child, which impacted her mental health. She has also worked with a group, the Digital Wellness Committee, who advocated for phone-free schools. When her district banned schools, students began talking to each other again, listened more attentively in class, and focused on learning.

Eileen Foley supports this bill enacting a statewide on cell phones and other smart devices in public schools. She believes that any students who require such smart devices for medical needs or learning differences can receive exceptions by way of accommodation through an IEP or 504 plan.

Steven Hernández, Esq., Executive Director of ConnCAN supports this bill, stating that statewide clarity will help educators focus on teachers and students focus on learning. However, he also notes the necessity of ensuring that classrooms are engaging, relevant, and intellectually compelling. Technological and digital literacy are essential skills, so while this ban limiting in-class phone use will help foster a productive learning environment, it is also crucial that students have access to learning experiences regarding technology.

Jennifer Jacobsen supports this bill but has some concerns about this bill and the Governor's bill (H.B. 5035). Although she supports both, she believes H.B. 5035 is the better draft of these two bills that share the same underlying intent. In terms of this bill, she believes the effective date of July 1, 2026, will be a challenge for some districts regarding costs incurred. She believes banning all personal devices, such as laptops. She also believes that the bill does not address emergency communications requirements, does not address

exceptions by a licensed physician (or someone similarly licensed), lacks a definition for the terms “possess” and “access,” and requires districts to provide storage for all mobile electronic devices under the definition.

Laurel Killough supports this bill and encourages further action. She believes that removing cell phones is a good first step, but that it should not stop at cell phones. Since laptops and Chromebooks offer similar distractions, she believes that digital distractions as a whole should be removed to create a better school environment for students.

Shannon Marimón, Executive Director of ReadyCT testifies that ReadyCT supports this bill. ReadyCT focuses on workforce readiness and consequently believes that skills such as focus, collaboration, and professionalism are paramount for learning how to work in the professional world. In-class phone use limits students’ abilities to learn these necessary skills. ReadyCT also supports the bill’s provisions for medical exemptions and accommodations when needed.

Steven Rioux, Superintendent of Putnam Public Schools supports this bill. School leaders like him have seen the negative impacts phone use and social media have on children. The research now supports his firsthand experiences. A bell-to-bell ban will create new opportunities to talk to each other that phone use often limits. Developing social skills, reducing classroom disruptions, and supporting healthier habits regarding technology use are important and children must learn these skills during a critical developmental window. This bill limiting phone use in schools will help students and their well-being.

Elena Veltri supports this bill as a high school teacher who has seen first-hand the damage and distraction phones cause in schools.

Jennifer Vignone supports this bill as a public-school teacher. She began her career before phones became an in-class distraction and has seen the shift in the learning environment as technology became a persistent distraction for students. Phones diminish student’s abilities to concentrate, persevere, and engage. When her district implemented a phone restriction policy two years ago, she has observed meaningful improvements. Students are more attentive, participate more, and persevere more readily when facing challenges. The overall school culture feels healthier, which is why she believes a bill like this that limits phone use in schools is necessary for a better learning environment.

Regina von Gootkin supports this bill but stresses the importance of enforcing this policy. When there is no enforcement, such a policy only exists on paper. Furthermore, there are multiple ways to enforce no phones in schools. So, such enforcement does not necessitate burdensome costs to school districts. She also notes how more than 25 states have already enacted a statewide policy to ban phones in schools. In summary, the research already shows that phones are bad for students, teachers, learning, and mental health. She also believes that exceptions will be made when necessary (e.g., IEP-required devices). Because the benefits far outweigh any possible downsides, Regina strongly supports this bill.

Kajisia Wright supports this bill. As a student, she has seen the benefits of technology, but has come to understand that technology has done more harm than good. Phones have created a school environment that no longer feels centered around learning. She often sees

other students on their phones in class and they do not have the self-control to set aside their screens for an extended period. During one of her classes, a student was caught using their phone to cheat. The entire class now does all work on paper. Kajsia believes that issues like this will not arise if stricter phone policies were in place.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

PJ August opposes this bill. Although they believe that cell phones do not belong in elementary schools, they do believe in further discussion regarding cell phone use in middle and high schools. Due to the reality of technology being an everyday presence in people's lives, they believe that proper education on how to appropriately use electronics is crucial.

Jaime Barr Shelburn, VP of Prof. Development CABE, opposes this bill. Although they support creating rules and guidance around cell phone use to minimize distractions and protect mental health, they also believe that the implementation of such rules and plans should remain at the local level, with the school districts. They believe that every community and student have unique needs and a state mandate does not account for such variation.

Francine Coss, Superintendent of Thomaston Public Schools, opposes this bill because she believes this bill is overly broad. She disagrees with the limits placed on cell phone use extending beyond the classroom. She would also like greater flexibility with respect to local board's authority to implement and develop policy, greater flexibility in determining cell phone storage methods, and continued recognition of IEPs, 504 plans, and medically necessary exceptions.

Christopher Duberek opposes this bill because this bill because he agrees with his school's phone policy (allowing allows phone use in between classes), which would no longer be allowed under this bill. He also believes that parents provide phones to their children for safety reasons. The presence of gun violence in schools would leave both parents and students unable to communicate with each other in an emergency.

Peter Faulk, Founder of Thought Shift opposes this bill because he believes this bill focuses exclusively on the symptom but not the source. Rather than banning phones, he proposes using his agency, Thought Shift, to influence students towards healthier habits.

Sophia Furbush opposes this bill because she relies on her phone to stay organized. Communicate with family and manage responsibilities. She also believes this bill removes a level of independence and security from students. Instead of banning cell phones completely, she recommends restricting phone use during instructional time while allowing students to keep possession of the phones throughout the school day. This would minimize in-class distraction while also allowing students to keep their phones in case of an emergency.

Erika Haynes opposes this bill because she and her family communicated with each other during an emergency. Her children have been in lockdowns and used their cellphones to contact her and keep her updated on their well-being. She opposes this bill because she believes a phone is a lifeline during emergencies.

Maxwell Haynes opposes this bill because he has been in a school lockdown. He wants to keep access to his phone so he can continue to communicate with his parents as needed.

Jaya Iyer, representing Center for Youth Leadership, opposes this bill because. Although they support a bell-to-bell ban on cell phones from kindergarten to 8th grade, they disagree on a bell-to-bell ban on cell phones for high school students. They believe that high school students should learn how to learn to live in a digital age. They believe that a ban on cell phones during class time while allowing cell phone use between classes and during lunchtime is a better approach for high school students.

Joshua Marciniszyn opposes this bill because he believes any “no phones in class” rule should be handled like any other rule, such as no chewing gum or being respectful. He also believes that appropriate cell phones use should be taught, which comes with practice and experience. Additionally, he believes that any law prohibiting cell phones should include everyone in school, including adults. If the law excludes adults, then 18-year-old students should be exempt. Cell phones are also crucial for student-parent communication, especially in emergencies. Finally, he questions the schools’ and administrators’ ability to enforce such a law.

The following people oppose this bill for similar, if not identical, reasons. Their school districts have already implemented a cell phone policy that works for their students and community. They do not believe a statewide mandate is the best solution due to its inflexibility for districts with unique needs and circumstances.

- **David Muharem, Principal of Long River Middle School**
- **Ian Neviaser, Superintendent of Lyme-Old Lyme Schools**
- **Michael Yamin, Regional School District 16 Superintendent**

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) opposes this bill because CABE supports SDE guidance, which recommends the use of cell phones in schools based on grade level. High school students need to learn how to appropriately use cellphones in society and the workplace. Parents should also be part of the conversation regarding the creation of cell phone school policy. Finally, most districts have already created their own cell phone policies after considerable deliberation and local input.

Anne Singer opposes this bill. As a student, she believes this bill goes too far. Phones allow students to stay in contact with their families throughout the day. Students’ anxieties may be exacerbated during an emergency if they do not have access to their phones. She suggests that this bill be amended to ban cell phone possession and use during class time while allowing phone use during other times, such as lunch or in passing.

OTHER COMMENTS:

Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) comments that the list of devices that would be prohibited during the school day is broad, which would result in the prohibition of various and essential medical devices and medical software applications. Although CHA efforts to reduce students’ distractions, CHA also deems it essential to minimize any intrusions into students’ health-related needs. CHA asks for limited exceptions for medical issues and devices.

Dr. Cem Demirci, Head of Endocrinology & Diabetes at Connecticut Children’s shares their thoughts on this bill. They commend the intention of this bill but note that many patients manage their medical needs and diagnoses with a phone via a mobile health application. They share concern about the unintended consequences of this bill, even if the intention behind it is good.

Lilah Gettler shares her thoughts and experiences as public high school student, where she spent two years with phones in class and two years without. She notes how people would bump into each other because everyone was preoccupied with their phones while walking through the hallway. Now, people wave “hi” and talk to each other during lunchtime. She also notes how her school spent \$80,000 on Yondr pouches, which act more as a deterrent than an enforced policy. Many students in her school leave their phones in cars, backpacks, or at home to avoid putting their phones in a pouch. She ends noting that despite initial, strong opposition to the phone ban at the time of its implementation, the overall social and educational effects of the phone ban have been positive due to compromises between students and administration.

Sophie Wang shares her thoughts on this bill, believing that a statewide ban on phones in schools is an inefficient way to spend the education budget. At her high school, there has been little to no change despite enacting a phone ban these past two years. Students gave no input to the administration’s decision to buy Yondr pouches. Sophie shares that students have found ways not to use Yondr pouches. So, these pouches create a façade that phones are banned while students bypass the ban. Sophie also believes that this bill does not teach students self-control.

Reported by: Lianne Waite

Date: 4/8/26