

Dear Senators,

I'm writing in support of S.284, a proposed bill to ban the use of cellphones and social media in schools. Putting some societal controls on children's use of these technologies is long overdue. But many people, including Health Commissioner Mark Levine, still have their heads in the sand. His statement that we should instead focus on "health education" by informing children of the "pros and cons" leaves me wondering if he's fit for his job. At the very least Dr. Levine should be aware that hand-held devices and social media are — and were designed to be — highly addictive: "educating" children about their harms will do about as much as sitting a heroin addict down and explaining how harmful the drug is.

The evidence is clear and overwhelming:

- Facebook's founding president, Sean Parker, now admits that the company knew from the start that they were creating an addictive product, one aimed at "exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology."
- According to The American Journal of Psychiatry, "Internet addiction is resistant to treatment, entails significant risks, and has high relapse rates."
- A study of 14-24 year-olds in the UK found that social media "exacerbate children's and young people's body image worries, and worsen bullying, sleep problems and feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness".
- A 2017 study in the US found that the suicide rate among teenagers has risen in tandem with their ownership of smartphones.

All of this is why so many Silicon Valley technologists — including the above-mentioned Sean Parker — are keeping their children away from screens, in part by sending them to private schools that prohibit the use of smartphones, tablets and laptops. It's apparent that the designers of these technologies know a lot more about them than Dr. Levine. I can only imagine their derisive laughter if they heard him say that "health education" will do anything to limit their harms.

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