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## TESTIMONY

**Testimony To:** House Committee on Education

**Respectfully Submitted by:** Jill Briggs Campbell, Deputy Secretary

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**Subject:** H.54, An act relating to cell phone-free schools

**Date:** May 8, 2025

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### Purpose

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.54, an act relating to cell phone-free schools. The Agency strongly supports the development of a statewide cell phone policy and offers the following feedback on the language under consideration. Available data show that many schools have already taken steps to address student cell phone use. In crafting a statewide approach, it is important to ensure the policy is responsive to the needs of educators while avoiding being overly prescriptive and creating unnecessary burden. The intention is to recognize and build upon effective practices already underway, using those efforts as a model for districts that have not yet adopted similar policies.

### Recommendations

The Agency recommends that implementation of the statewide policy should begin with the 2026–27 school year. This timeline allows sufficient time for thoughtful development of a model policy, clear communication with the field, and coordination with schools and supervisory unions. It also provides schools adequate lead time to prepare for implementation, including communicating to their school communities in advance of implementation.

Following the survey research and engagement with the field, the Agency finds itself positioned to produce a model policy in collaboration with the Vermont School Boards Association to ensure a cohesive and equitable approach across the state. A centrally developed policy can reduce confusion, minimize variation across districts, and promote clarity for students, families, and educators. Importantly, the recommended approach would allow schools that already have strong, effective policies in place to continue their current practices, as long as those align with the core components of the model policy.



## Recommended Language

- (a) *The Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Vermont School Boards Association, shall develop and, from time to time, update a policy to limit or prohibit the use of cell phones by its students while on a school site or while the students are under the supervision of an employee or employees of that school district or supervisory union.*

The Agency recommends that the legislation provides broad carve outs to avoid being overly prescriptive. Providing clear but flexible guardrails will empower educators and education leaders to implement the policy in ways that are responsive to their school's unique characteristics, needs, and culture. In particular, allowing for reasonable, locally determined exceptions can help ensure successful implementation without disrupting effective existing practices or placing unnecessary strain on staff and students.

## Recommended Language

### (b) *Exceptions*

- (1) *The policy shall provide exceptions for students to possess and use a cell phone or personal electronic device if such possession or use is:*

*(A) required as part of a student's individualized health care plan, individualized education program, or 504 plan, which shall be documented according to applicable State and federal law;*

*(B) If an administrator grants permission for a student to possess or use a cell phone for an academically sound reason*

~~*(B) necessary for participation in the Dual Enrollment Program established under section 944 of this title, regardless of whether such 10 participation occurs on or off the property of the school district; or*~~

~~*(C) necessary for participation in a career and technical education program.*~~

Finally, there is concern about potential cost implications for schools—particularly related to training, enforcement, and possible changes to physical or technological infrastructure. The Agency recommends that a fiscal note be included to assess the financial impact on the education system and to ensure that schools are adequately supported in meeting the policy requirements.

## Social Media

The current section of H.54 addressing social media use appears redundant with many local policies and practices already adopted by school boards. Including this level of detail may shift the focus away from the bill's primary intent—establishing cell phone-free learning environments. Moreover, the implications and consequences of these provisions are not yet fully understood.

The Agency recommends that any legislative language related to social media remain high-level and focused on overarching expectations, rather than prescribing specific

requirements. As currently drafted, this section risks being overly prescriptive and may place an undue burden on schools and districts. Leaving these types of considerations to the local policy allows schools to be agile in a rapidly changing landscape.

Additionally, the definition of “social media” in Section 2(6) warrants careful review. Many online tools and platforms used in schools—such as learning management systems, classroom communication apps, and educational software—could be unintentionally swept into the definition. There is also risk that this definition could change as technology rapidly evolves. The Agency advises caution in crafting language that does not create a burdensome vetting process for schools to determine which tools are permissible and which are not.

## **Guidance & Resources**

- [AOE Cell Phone Guidance](#)
- [Planning Together: A Playbook for Student Personal Device Policies](#)
- [2023 Annual Technology Report](#)
- [AOE Education Technology Webpage](#)