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State of Vermont  
Department of Public Safety  
<http://dps.vermont.gov/>

## TESTIMONY

**Testimony To:** House Committee on Education  
**Respectfully Submitted by:** Sunni Eriksen, School Safety Program Manager  
**Subject:** H. 54: An act relating to cell phone-free schools  
**Date:** April 23, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of cell phone use in schools during times of crisis. I appreciate your attention to this matter, and I am glad to share additional information, recommendations, and best practices.

### Current Cell Phone/Technology Guidance for Vermont Schools:

The U.S. Department of Education encourages schools to develop a policy or set of guidelines that fits their local context and a framework to collaboratively develop a policy and implement it. Within the [\*Planning Together: A Playbook for Student Personal Device Policies\*](#), there are three key principles for policy development.

1. Development of policy with diverse and representative stakeholders can result in improved stakeholder buy-in and increased potential for success.
2. Building broad awareness and a shared stake in participating in and implementing a device policy enhances success as school leaders enforce the policy and ensure accountability.
3. Pairing device policies with an emphasis on digital citizenship at school and at home with systematic teaching for adults and children on student safety and productivity in online spaces helps ensure successful implementation.

The Vermont School Safety Center recommends that school districts and supervisory unions adopt and implement policies to manage student use of cell phones and other devices during the school day. These policies can be developed at a school district or supervisory union level and policy expectations should be outlined and included in the code of student conduct. This approach enables policy implementation from the administrative level downward and provides a unified support network for educators. This practice also allows for consideration of individual school culture and community needs in setting the specifics of an individual school policy.

Use of cell phones during school emergencies can have positive outcomes. Many parents provide their children with cell phones as a safety measure. This gives parents peace of mind knowing they have a direct line of communication with their child. Parents of high school students often have their child call or text to notify them when they arrive and depart from their destination. During an emergency, cell phones allow students to notify



their parents that they are safe and to provide updates on the situation. It also allows students the opportunity to clarify to their parents any rumors that may be circulating on social media or the internet.

However, there may be a variety of negative impacts to crisis response that may arise due to the use of cell phones. Immediate classroom response can be delayed if attention is being focused on devices. A sharp increase in cellular phone use can bottleneck telecom networks, causing problems for first responders and others. Parental flocking may be expedited by students reaching out through cell phones or other devices, which may inadvertently lead parents into dangerous or volatile areas.

Cell phones and other devices are a way for students and parents or guardians to communicate with each other, especially in case of emergency. Conversely, they may create their own threat. Ultimately, it is best practice to have schools and districts develop and implement policies outlining student cell phones in their schools. There are many resources available to districts and supervisory unions that can assist and provide guidance as these policies are developed to meet the needs of their schools.