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Dear Members of the Conference Committee:

On behalf of the over 22,000 members of the Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS), I write to convey our support of legislation to establish reasonable limits on student smartphone use during the school day, as proposed by H.5366 and S.2561. We appreciate the conference committee's thoughtful consideration of this issue and your commitment to promoting the healthy development and educational success of Massachusetts students.

Consistent with our organizational policy, the Society supports limiting smartphone use in K–12 schools during school hours, while recognizing that implementation should consider individual student, school, and community needs. This includes ensuring appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities or health conditions who may require access to devices during the school day. In addition, the MMS supports school-based media literacy programs that teach critical thinking, learning, and safety skills related to internet and social media use. Efforts to reduce distraction during the school day should be paired with education that helps young people navigate digital environments safely and responsibly outside the classroom.

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that excessive smartphone and social media use can negatively affect the mental, emotional, physical, and academic well-being of children and adolescents. Studies have associated problematic smartphone use among youth with increased rates of anxiety, depression, poor sleep, stress, reduced attention, and diminished academic performance.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Additionally, frequent social media use may increase adolescents' exposure to cyberbullying and online harassment, disrupt healthy peer relationships, and displace time spent in activities and experiences that

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<sup>1</sup> Smartphone usage and associated mental health outcomes amongst children and young people:

A systematic review, meta-analysis and GRADE of the evidence. *BMC Psychiatry*, 19(1), 356.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-019-2350-x>

<https://doi.org/10.1097/MOP.0000000000001462>

<sup>2</sup> Priftis, N., & Panagiotakos, D. (2023). Screen Time and Its Health Consequences in Children and Adolescents. *Children*, 10(10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10101665>

<sup>3</sup> Nagata, J. M., Lee, C. M., Hur, J. O., & Baker, F. C. (2025). What we know about screen time

and social media in early adolescence: A review of findings from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive

Development Study. *Current Opinion in Pediatrics*, 37(4), 357–364.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/MOP.0000000000001462>

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are protective for healthy development and emotional well-being.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Teachers and school administrators across the country report that smartphone distraction is a significant barrier to learning and classroom engagement.<sup>7</sup> Schools that have implemented smartphone restrictions have reported encouraging early outcomes, including reduced classroom distraction, improved student engagement, and a more positive school climate.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>

Importantly, national medical organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association, have recognized the importance of limiting smartphone distraction during the school day to support students' focus, healthy development, and overall well-being.<sup>12,13</sup> Creating learning environments with fewer digital distractions can help students engage more fully socially, emotionally, and academically throughout the school day.

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<sup>4</sup> Abi-Jaoude E, et al. *Smartphone use and mental health: going beyond school restriction policies*. *Lancet Regional Health Europe*. 2025. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanep/article/PIIS2666-7762\(25\)00029-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanep/article/PIIS2666-7762(25)00029-8/fulltext)

<sup>5</sup> Martínez-Ferrer B, et al. *Problematic mobile phone and social media use among adolescents and its relationship with cyberbullying and social anxiety*. *Scientific Reports*. 2026. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12921295/>

<sup>6</sup> Boer M, et al. *Problematic smartphone use and the quantity and quality of peer engagement among adolescents*. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2021. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563221003484>

<sup>7</sup> Sohn, S. Y., Rees, P., Wildridge, B., Kalk, N. J., & Carter, B. (2019). Prevalence of problematic smartphone usage and associated mental health outcomes amongst children and young people: A systematic review, meta-analysis and GRADE of the evidence. *BMC Psychiatry*, 19(1), 356. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-019-2350-x>.

<sup>8</sup> Carrillo, S. What worked and what didn't with a cellphone ban at a Kentucky school. *Ideastream Public Media*. [What worked and what didn't with a cellphone ban at a Kentucky school | Ideastream Public Media](https://www.ideastream.com/what-worked-and-what-didnt-with-a-cellphone-ban-at-a-kentucky-school)

<sup>9</sup> Opinion | The Unexpected Upside of Phone Bans in Schools —*The New York Times*. (n.d.). <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/17/opinion/phone-bans-schools-kids.html>

<sup>10</sup> Sheinerman, M.-R. (2025, August 27). In phone-free schools, analog entertainment brings lunchrooms to life. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/08/27/school-cellphone-bans-analog-entertainment-games/>

<sup>11</sup> Survey: Parents and teens support school cellphone bans, and most don't perceive major downsides | *Brookings*. (n.d.). <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/survey-parents-and-teens-support-school-cellphone-bans-and-most-dont-perceive-major-downsides/>

<sup>12</sup> H-60.894 Guidelines for Restricting Cell Phones in K-12 Schools | *AMA*. (n.d.). <https://policysearch.ama-assn.org/policyfinder/detail/H-60.894?uri=%2FAMADoc%2FHOD.xml-H-60.894.xml>

<sup>13</sup> Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents: *Policy Statement | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics*. (n.d.). <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/157/2/e2025075320/206129/Digital-Ecosystems-Children-and-Adolescents-Policy?autologincheck=redirected%20https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/157/2/e20250>

Accordingly, the MMS supports thoughtful, developmentally appropriate approaches to limiting smartphone use during the school day as part of broader efforts to promote students' academic success, social connection, and overall well-being.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Rebecca W. Brendel, MD, JD