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Katie Nee's Testimony Before the RI State House In Support of a Ban on Cell Phones in Schools

Chairman McNamara, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Katie Nee and I am the mother of three young girls who attend Cranston public schools. I'm here today to express my strong support for the proposed legislation to ban cell phones in schools during the school day.

A few months ago, I had the opportunity to tour Mount Hope high school which instituted Yondr pouches in November. These are magnetic pouches that allow students to keep their phone on their person but prevent them from accessing the phone the entire school day.

After just a few months, the reports from the school resource officer and social worker were incredibly persuasive - a significant reduction in fights, kids are no longer meeting to vape in the bathroom, and a huge drop in inappropriate images being circulated on Snap Chat. Even more transformational were their observations that kids aren't walking down the hall staring at their phones. In fact, at lunch, they are playing Jenga and cards and talking to each other again. The teachers are no longer grappling with how to manage the constant distraction because the administration is taking responsibility for enforcing the policy.

One of the most important observations I made during that tour was that it is absolutely critical to ban phones all day - not just during classroom instruction.

This legislation which instructs all school districts to develop such a cell phone policy could have enormous benefits to our children in several areas.

1. **Rising Mental Health Issues:** Numerous studies show that the significant increase in anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide rates among adolescents correlates with the increased use of smartphones and social media. This is also common sense - we know in our guts that scrolling through a phone all day cannot possibly be good for kids.
2. **Kids Can't Focus or Converse.**
 - a. Many teachers report that kids can't focus long enough to read a book or follow complex arguments. Their brains are being wired to need constant stimulation and they are anxious about needing to look at their phone.
 - b. We all want our children to be tech-savvy, but it's far more important that they learn to build real human connections. I want my girls to talk to their

friends, make up silly stories and use their imagination. I also want them to be bored sometimes and let their minds wander. Smartphones are taking that away and we have the power claim it back for our kids.

3. **Social Media.** Kids are being exposed to violent and inappropriate content much too young. They are watching fights, holding themselves to unrealistic beauty standards, and engaging in cyberbullying.

This isn't about punishing students. It's about setting boundaries that protect their focus, their self-esteem, and their ability to engage in the moment. We can and should make exceptions for students who need phones for medical reasons—but the norm should be that phones stay out of sight and out of mind during the school day.

I'm sure you will hear from well meaning parents who are concerned about reaching their child in a true crisis. While I appreciate that fear, all of us went to school at a time when our parents had to call the office to reach us. I believe the chance of a parent being able to react to an emergency faster than teachers and law enforcement is extremely unlikely. On the contract, the chance that a generation of kids will be forever adversely impacted by their reliance on cell phones is extremely likely and its happening.

As a parent, I fully support this bill. Thank you for considering this important legislation and for listening to the voices of parents like me.

Sincerely,

Katie Nee