

# Education Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5035 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT REQUIRING SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO BAN CELLULAR PHONES IN  
**Title:** THE CLASSROOM.

**Vote Date:** 3/16/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/20/2026

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Request of the Governor Pursuant to Joint Rule 9.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

To provide a statewide ban on cellphone use during school with authorized exceptions. To reduce classroom distractions, improve student focus and learning, prevent cyberbullying, and ensure a safe and consistent environment across all schools while still allowing limited, appropriate use when needed.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

#### **Ned Lamont, Governor**

The Governor supports this bill because banning cellphones during the entire school day positively impacts students' social skills, grades, and behavior. The State Board of Education and State Department of Education have already issued guidance to school boards that they should ban cellphone use during the day. This proposal does not ban all wireless communication, rather it must be authorized for instructional purposes, when a student's health care provider determines that such use is necessary for the health and well-being of the student, or for use by students receiving special education services. This proposal will also call for districts to work collaboratively with local boards of education, parents, and students on what implementation and storage of student devices will look like and come up with procedures for communicating with parents and guardians of students in the event of an emergency and requiring notification of such policies and procedures to families and inclusion in student handbooks.

#### **Charlene Tucker, Commissioner- State Department of Education**

The Department of Education supports this bill because it empowers school leaders to continue the focused work to ensure that school environments are safe, classrooms are conducive to teaching and learning, and students can develop social and interpersonal skills with adults and peers and succeed academically without distraction. In January 2026, the Department conducted a landscape scan of Connecticut local and regional boards of education cell phone policies. This review yielded the following: 70 percent of districts have a bell-to-bell ban at the elementary grade level, 71 percent of districts have a bell-to-bell ban at the middle grade level and 31 percent have a bell-to-bell ban at the high school grade level. Currently, 25 states have implemented statewide K-12 bell-to-bell bans or are currently debating them in legislative sessions, indicating a national trend in this policy direction.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Carmen Clarkin, Strategic Initiative Assistant- Connecticut Voices for Children**

Connecticut Voices for Children supports this bill because cellphone use in school counters academic purposes. It distracts students when they are trying to learn and also has negative health impacts. Ninety seven percent of 11- to 17-year-olds report using their cellphones during school and “Research has found that students get hundreds of notifications on their cellphones a day, often during school hours. And many experts have raised alarms over how cellphone use is hurting kids’ mental health and well-being”. Once distracted, it can take 20 minutes to get refocused, this makes it nearly impossible for students to fully give their attention to the lesson. In countries where cellphones have been banned, students started doing better academically, especially the ones who were struggling before. In Manchester, where they implemented a pilot program in the 2024-2025 school year, there was increased engagement, less drama, and less cyberbullying. The social media companies’ business model is built to keep people scrolling. Young people are far more susceptible to addictive characteristics, and so are the most affected by social media than anyone else. Finally, this is a critical period in kids’ cognitive development, and cellphones alter them by hurting self-esteem and reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

### **Francine Coss, Superintendent of Schools- Thomaston Public Schools**

Thomaston Public Schools support this bill but requests some changes. Clear statutory language distinguishing “instructional time” from the broader “school day.” Explicit preservation of local board authority to implement grade-based and developmentally appropriate policies. Continued recognition of IEP/504 and medically necessary exceptions. Flexibility in determining storage methods. Local boards must retain implementation discretion.

### **Dr. Cem Demirci, Head of Endocrinology- Diabetes Connecticut Children**

Dr. Cem Demirci requests specific language be included to exempt medical devices and/or phones functioning as medical devices.

### **Kate Dias, President- Connecticut Education Association (CEA)**

CEA supports this bill because there has been an increasing body of peer reviewed research that students access to electronic devices is distracting and addictive. The bill would benefit from clear guidelines surrounding six categories. (1) notification of and communication of district policies, (2) stakeholder input and reporting, (3) safe and secure storage of students’

cell phones, (4) alternative means of contact between parents and students, (5) school activities where prohibitions of cell phone usage are in-effect, and (6) necessary exemptions around the use of appropriate electronic devices during instructional hours. Each of these six areas are articulated below. Conversations with the school community should happen to be clear and transparent about a phone ban.

**Lilah Gettler, Senior at Wilton High School**

Lilah supports this bill because she has noticed a significant difference after her school imposed a phone ban. Before, students did not talk to one another, as they were on their phones all the time. After the ban, Lilah cannot walk in the hallway without saying hi to people, and she talks to different people at lunch every day. Her school purchased the Yonder Pouches, but she finds that most students just leave their phone in their bag or car.

**Michael Hren, Professor**

Professor Hren supports this bill because as a professor at UCONN, he sees the effects of students with fragmented attention spans. They have shorter attention spans, weaker concentration, and a reduced capacity to read and digest complex material in and outside the classroom. Half of today's 11-to-17-year-olds report receiving, on average, at least 237 text messages each day. That's one message every four minutes during waking hours. Connecticut spends vast sums of money trying to get all students to reach acceptable academic standards for reading and math. At the same time, we undermine that effort by allowing devices in the classroom that steal attention, distract students from teachers, and train children to search for the next dopamine hit.

**Shannon Marimon, Executive Director- ReadyCT**

ReadyCT supports this bill because the overuse of cellphones in adolescence has a direct and long-term impact on the future workforce for several reasons:

- Erosion of Soft/Durable Skills
- The Loss of Deep Focus
- Mental Well-being and Professional Resilience

**Jonathan Rheume, Co-Founder- Fostering Optimal Connectivity, Understanding & Safety (FOCUS)**

FOCUS supports this bill but does not support a full "ban" on phones, rather a nuanced policy approach. They believe a statewide bell-to-bell standard will improve test scores and make them more prepared for life after school. After Manchester implemented phone restrictions, there was a 64% reduction in disciplinary incidents and violence, 4% increase in "A/B" grades, and a 3% decline in "F" grades. Parents that are worried that they will not be able to contact their child in the case of an emergency should know that cellphone use during an emergency increases risk by distracting students, creating noise, and jamming emergency frequencies.

**Steven Rioux, Superintendent- Putnam Public Schools**

Steven Rioux supports this bill because he sees firsthand that constant access to smartphones and social media contributes to anxiety, distraction, sleep disruption, peer conflict, and diminished attention spans among children and adolescents. Students habitually

check their phones without even realizing it. A ban would also allow students to develop important social skills, ones they do not get because they can be alone on their phones. If policies vary from place to place, schools are placed in a difficult position. Similar stances have been taken for public health when they banned smoking in schools. Excessive smartphone use is comparable to a public health concern. A bell-to-bell policy, implemented thoughtfully, with clear storage procedures and appropriate exceptions for medical or special education needs, gives schools the clarity they need and gives families a consistent message that student well-being matters.

**Jennifer Vignone, Teacher, Manchester High School**

Jennifer supports this bill because after her district implemented cellphone restrictions, he has noticed a profound difference in her students. They are more attentive, participate in discussions, and talk to one another before class.

**Leslie Blatteau, President- New Haven Federation of Teachers, Local 933**

Supports this bill.

**Steven Hernandez, Executive Director- ConnCAN**

Supports this bill.

**Pastor William McCullough, Founder and Senior Advisor**

Supports this bill.

**Julia-Madison Phillips- Youth Unplugged CT**

Supports this bill.

**Kathleen Swec, Pediatrician MD**

Supports this bill.

**16 Citizens Also Expressed Support**

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Nathaniel Briones**

Nathaniel opposes this bill because as a student at Ledyard High School, he uses social media throughout the day, and uses it to listen to music. Nathaniel is at the top of his class and is also unstressed. He supports schools making their own cellphone policies and not a statewide ban. The drawbacks to banning cellphones is that there would be a regression in happiness and an increase in anxiety because they would not be able to contact home. According to Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization that specializes in rating the age appropriateness of media for educators and parents, out of the students who have phones, aged 11 to 17, 97% of them use them throughout the school day. A ban would affect every student. They could no longer listen to music or share funny Tik Toks with their friends.

**Connecticut Hospital Association**

The Connecticut Hospital Association is opposed to the bill as it is currently written because it would ban devices that some students need for medical purposes. These devices are connected to the internet, and there are some medical software applications that are on the phone that students need to use. The current exception is too narrow, a better idea would be

an exception to the ban on a case-by-case basis. This is what New York has done and had shown to work. They urge you insert the following language into the bill such as subparagraphs (C) and (D) of subdivision (2) of section (b) that clarifies the intent of the law as follows:

Starting at lines 24:

(b)(2) A student in a public school in the state may use or access a wireless communication device during the school day if...

(C) it is necessary for the healthcare of the student, or

(D) the student is a caregiver who is routinely responsible for the well-being of a family member or other person.

### **Michael Criss, First Selectman- Town of Harwinton**

First Selectman Criss opposes this bill as written because it poses unintended consequences for student safety, local decision-making, and school operations. Cellphones have played a role in documenting bullying, harassment, and inappropriate behavior by peers or adults. Removing access entirely may limit students' ability to report unsafe situations in real time.

First Selectman Criss recommends the bills be amended to:

- Preserve local flexibility so districts can tailor policies to community needs.
- Provide clear exceptions for student safety and reporting of suspected abuse, harassment, or unsafe conduct.
- Ensure students are not disciplined for using a device in good faith to report a concern.
- Maintain strong communication pathways between students, families, and schools during emergencies.
- Focus on adult accountability and training alongside student restrictions.

### **Maxwell Haynes, Student**

Maxwell opposes this bill because his school already has a cellphone policy, and he does not feel safe in school. He has been in lockdowns where he thought he was going to die, and the only thing that helped him stay calm was talking to his parents.

### **Jaya Iyer- Center for Youth Leadership**

Center for Youth Leadership opposes this bill because they believe the rules should be different for grades 9-12. They would like a more flexible approach, as students those ages are often employed, care for siblings, or serve as spokespeople for their families, and they need to prepare for life after high school where there will be no phone ban.

### **Ian Neviasser, Superintendent of Schools- Lyme- Old Lyme Schools**

Ian Neviasser opposes this bill because school districts are already addressing this issue on their own. A statewide mandate now does not solve a new problem; it attempts to regulate one that schools have already addressed effectively.

### **Sophie Wang, Junior at Wilton High School**

Sophie states that at Wilton, where there has been a ban for two years, there has been little change. The district paid a lot of money for Yonder pouches, and students do not even use them. They have found ways around it by using "decoy" phones are calculators. By implementing this ban, the school district has taken away the student's ability to learn self-control. Students understand if that if they go on their phones during school, there will be negative impacts. Schools could implement policies where phones are not allowed out in cafeterias or hallways but are not locked away. Through this, students can practice regulating

their own phone usage and phones can be a learning tool within classrooms to document or submit work.

**Derek Muharem, Principal- Region 16 Board of Education**

Opposes this bill.

**Michael Paul Yamin, Superintendent of Schools- Regional School District**

Opposes this bill.

**Kim Walker, Board of Education Chair- Westbrook**

Opposes this bill.

**5 Citizens Expressed Opposition**

**Reported by: Henry Russell**

**Date: 03/30/2026**