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Claudia Fury-Aguirre
Manager of Kansas Policy and Outreach, Aligned
Proponent for HB2421 (Written-Only Testimony)
Bell-to-Bell Cell Phone Policy
House Education Committee
January 16, 2026

Chairwoman Estes and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support** of **House Bill 2421.**

Aligned is a nonprofit, business-led coalition working to strengthen education and workforce systems across Kansas and Missouri so that all students graduate prepared for postsecondary education, training, and meaningful careers. **We support HB 2421 because it advances student learning, protects instructional time, and promotes healthy school environments for all students.**

From employers' perspectives across Kansas, one message is consistent: students need strong academic foundations, focus, and the ability to engage meaningfully with others. Increasingly, districts, educators, and families are raising concerns that constant access to personal electronic communication devices during the school day undermines those goals. HB 2421 addresses these concerns by establishing clear expectations around device use while preserving local flexibility in implementation.

Research consistently shows that unrestricted access to personal devices during instructional time negatively affects student attention, learning outcomes, and classroom engagement. Studies also indicate that reducing phone use during the school day improves student focus and academic performance, particularly for younger students and for students who already face learning barriers. Importantly, these benefits are often greatest for students from lower-income backgrounds, who are more likely to experience learning disruptions and fewer structured opportunities to disengage from screens outside of school.

HB 2421 reinforces the importance of instructional time by prohibiting the use of personal electronic communication devices during the school day, while allowing districts and accredited nonpublic schools to adopt policies and procedures that reflect local context and operational realities. The bill appropriately includes exceptions for students with individualized education programs, 504 plans, or documented medical needs, ensuring that accessibility, student health, and individual circumstances remain central considerations.

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Aligned also supports the bill's provisions related to professional digital boundaries between school employees and students. Clear guidelines limiting private or direct social media communication for official school purposes protect students, educators, and school systems alike. These safeguards reflect best practices in student safety and professional ethics, while still allowing schools to communicate publicly and transparently about school activities and events through approved platforms.

We also support the bill's requirement that districts, and accredited nonpublic schools report aggregate screen-time data for students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Increased transparency around early-grade screen exposure can help inform future conversations about age-appropriate technology use, instructional practices, and student development, without collecting or reporting personally identifiable student data.

Importantly, HB 2421 does not impose a one-size-fits-all enforcement model. Local governing authorities retain discretion to set enforcement procedures and disciplinary responses that align with their school culture and community needs. This balance between statewide expectations and local control is essential for effective implementation and long-term success.

From a workforce readiness standpoint, the core provisions of HB 2421 support skills employers value deeply: sustained attention, interpersonal communication, self-regulation, and engagement in learning. Creating school environments where students can focus during the school day and build healthy relationships with peers and educators benefits not only academic outcomes, but long-term success beyond graduation.

For these reasons, **Aligned respectfully urges the committee to support House Bill 2421**. We believe this legislation represents a thoughtful, research-informed step toward improving learning conditions for Kansas students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Claudia Fury-Aguirre
Manager of Kansas Policy and Outreach, Aligned

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In Person Testimony – Proponent of HB 2421

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2421. I am a classroom teacher at Goddard High School and a mother of three children. I offer this testimony both as a concerned parent and a frustrated educator.

In my 12 years of teaching experience, I have worked in two very different environments: one with a strict, bell-to-bell, phone-free policy, and another with no consistent, schoolwide phone policy. The difference between these two settings—particularly in student engagement, social interaction, and learning retention—is striking and cannot be dismissed.

In the building where phones were not allowed, students spent passing periods and lunch socializing with peers. They arrived to class more focused, more present, and more ready to learn. In contrast, my current building is filled with students walking the halls staring at the six-inch screen that is rarely far from their hands—or their minds.

While I am permitted to set my own classroom phone policy, the effects of unrestricted phone use between classes and in other classrooms inevitably bleed into my learning environment. The moment students leave my classroom, many immediately reach for their phones to check notifications or resume scrolling through social media. This constant noise and continuous influx of information—whether for entertainment or not—is taxing on developing brains.

Our brains require downtime to process and consolidate new information. With constant access to phones, many students never experience this necessary quiet time, making it more difficult for them to retain what they have just learned. Additionally, the endless scrolling of highly stimulating content has negatively impacted students' attention spans. A study by Microsoft has shown that the average human attention span has dropped to just eight seconds. How can we realistically expect students to learn, retain, and apply new material when their focus is disrupted so frequently?

I recognize that many of these challenges extend beyond the classroom and require work at home and within our communities. However, removing phones from schools is a meaningful and immediate step we can take right now.

As a teacher, a mother, and a Kansas citizen, I urge you to support HB 2421 for the sake of our students—the future of our great state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kaitlyn Barrientos

Testimony to the House Education Committee – Proponent Testimony for HB 2421

January 15, 2026

Kate Beebe, Preschool teacher and parent of 11 year old and 15 year old in Shawnee Mission School District
katehuff@yahoo.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my support for bill 2421.

After reading the book *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haight, I am convinced that cell phones are a major distraction to children of all ages in schools. Adults and teachers need to show them that it is possible, and very healthy, to put these devices away during the school day to allow their brains to grow in attention, focus, and concentration. Some may say it is too costly to implement this, but I think it is absolutely worth the effort and investment for the sake of our kids' attention spans and mental health.

19 other states plus Washington DC have enacted bell to bell cell phone bans successfully, and schools in these states have witnessed increased engagement and focus among students and decreased anxiety and distraction, especially at the high school level.

A bell-to-bell phone-free policy provides students with an average of 7 hours each school day to be fully present and free from the pressures and harms of phones and social media. This policy helps them to restore connections and reclaim a critical period in their development.

Please vote yes on HB 2421.

Thank you,

Kate Beebe

Prairie Village, KS

Testimony to the House Education Committee
February 6, 2026
Bill HB 2421 – Proponent
Chris Brent, Parent, Shawnee Mission School District
cvbrent@yahoo. com

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chris Brent and I am writing to voice my **strong support** for HB 2421, the bell-to-bell phone-free schools bill.

I am a parent of two children in the Shawnee Mission School District—one at Shawnee Mission East High School and one at Indian Hills Middle School. Every week I hear stories from my kids about how phones and social media distract students during class, pull attention away from teachers, and fuel drama that carries on throughout the school day instead of staying focused on learning. As a parent, it is frustrating to know how hard our teachers are working while phones constantly compete for students' attention.

A clear, consistent statewide rule that personal devices must be stored away and inaccessible during instructional time will make it easier for teachers to teach and for students to learn. Research and early experience in other states show that strong school cellphone limits lead to more focused students and better academic outcomes, even if there is an adjustment period at first. This bill still allows schools to make exceptions for health and other documented needs and does not prevent parents from reaching their children through the school office when necessary.

Please vote **YES** on HB 2421 so that Kansas students can benefit from distraction-free classrooms where learning comes first.

Sincerely,

Chris Brent
Shawnee Mission, KS

To whom it may concern,

My name is Allison Brimblecom. My husband Billy and I live in Lenexa and our 2 kids attend Mill Creek Elementary and Trailridge Middle School in the Shawnee Mission School District.

I was a public elementary school teacher for 10 years in KS and TN and I am passionate about supporting public education.

The science and research is very clear that phone-free schools are beneficial for students' learning, test scores, social relationships and mental health. Anyone in favor of keeping phones as a part of the school day - even just in hallways and at lunch - would be hard-pressed to show evidence or science that shows any benefit - other than, perhaps, convenience for adults.

It's time for a counter-cultural course correction. Smartphones have evolved and so should our policies. Kids on phones creates a huge profit for many stakeholders. Do we want big tech to lead our culture - a culture where it's now normal for young students to be on phones several hours a day? Or can public schools lead the way and set the standard?

It's not enough to ask students to keep phones in their backpacks. The online world that we have access to on our phones is by design - highly addictive. It's not a matter of students with developing brains needing more self-control. When students' phones are accessible - we're creating an environment that leads to them sneaking their phones, and putting the responsibility of policing phones on teachers.

Every day parents are making hard choices about limits they should have on technology in their own homes. I am not interested in telling other parents what is best for their families outside of school. But I believe a bell to bell policy where phones are locked up in Yonder pouches or in dedicated phone lockers is truly a GIFT we can give our kids. A gift not grounded in fear but grounded in love and care.

In my community, our school district has made some changes with technology policies but they are not enough. I hope the state of Kansas will be swift to to pass and implement this bill and join the other states and school districts leading the way in this space. Our leadership will give other school districts and states the U.S. the courage to do the same.

Sincerely,

Allison Brimblecom
Lenexa, KS

Testimony to the House Education Committee
February 6, 2026
Bill HB 2421 Proponent
Emily Brownlee, Masters in Secondary Education, ScreenStrong Ambassador, Parent of 4 in a Kansas Catholic School system
epbrownlee@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

My name is Emily Brownlee, I live in Overland Park, and I am the mother of four children ages 14, 12, 10, and 7. I have a Master's Degree in Secondary Education, and through the medically backed non-profit ScreenStrong, I speak to educators, parents and teens around the country about how screentime, smartphones, online gaming, and social media hinders healthy brain development. Thank you for reading my testimony supporting HB 2421.

I am sure some of you have heard the quote that the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second best time is now. The best time to have stopped Social Media's predatory ways would have been 20 years ago. The second best time is TODAY.

Our children live in an online world where evil is profitable. Where views, likes, comments, and outrage are celebrated over moral character, peace, safety, and privacy. Our children exist in a world where they are incredibly vulnerable to predation, addiction, depression, anxiety and suiciality - all of which are promoted and glorified on social media. The rates of these atrocious harms have risen dramatically in tandem with smartphone and social media use among children and teens.

We need to protect kids and teachers alike from crossing the professional boundary schools have had in place for decades. As a former high school teacher and coach, I am keenly aware how dangerous it is that schools have allowed students and faculty 24/7 access to each other on unregulated social media platforms, some of which that have disappearing content and messaging. I also want to emphasize that social media doesn't discriminate whether you are a public school student or a nonpublic school student. Every single Kansas child and teen deserves to attend school without being forced onto dangerous social media platforms. I am so thankful for the House Committee for including ALL Kansas children as I know numerous families, teachers, and administrators in the Kansas private school system who want this bill to pass!

I understand how we were lured as a society by these dopamine-inducing platforms, but all that has been left in the dust, is a serious youth mental health crisis.

There is zero educational benefit of a school requiring social media.

In fact, social media is a major liability.

Thousands of students in Kansas walked into high school last fall and were required by their school to interface with companies that allow: suicide content, anorexic coaching, sextortion, human trafficking, cyberbullying, drug access, self-harm challenges, and many more atrocious harms.

In order to participate in their activity of choice, students had to be on a platform that profits off of polarization, pornography, comparison, and infinite scrolling...Platforms where the executives and engineers who design the algorithms do not even allow their own children to interface with the toxic technology they so willfully force onto our children.

We can no longer wait for social media companies to do the right thing.

We have to act TODAY!

When you say YES to this bill, you are saying yes to so many wonderful things such as:

laughter, empathy, respect, and true friendship.

You are saying YES to:

Increasing teens' self-esteem

to

Improving student productivity & creativity

to

Fostering real connections and building authentic community

With voting YES to HB 2421, you can honor and save an entire generation by giving them their life back!

*****I also want to share with you a speech I gave to the Kansas State BOE last summer. Not only does it shed light on the topic at hand, but also on screentime in the classroom and 1:1 devices.**

Over the years, many health professionals and advocates have spoken to this board about the harms a technology dependent school has on children and teens.

In the months to come, I hope we can partner together to discuss kids' brains and screens, but today I am here to paint a painful, yet realistic picture of what our children experience each day as they enter **THE ALL NEW, BIG TECH AMERICAN SCHOOL**.

Kids, Teens....Before you enter the building, do you have your:

Video Camera in case you want to capture and post an embarrassing video of a classmate?
Your TikTok App
All your Instagram Influencers
Your Music
Netflix
YouTube
Discord
Nude pics that are circling the school?
Is your Geolocation ON and your 1,000 SNAPCHAT strangers in your pocket?
Oh, Don't forget your online gaming...
Fortnite
Minecraft
League of Legends
And make sure you still have access to millions of pornography videos

Phew, we are so glad you are prepared for school! To "enhance your learning experience", we are going to give you a 1:1 device to use all day as you sit at your desk. With this machine, you can:

Watch entertaining videos for the duration of class.

Alienate your teachers and peers.

Discover multiple ways around the firewall.

Cheat your way through high school.

"Learn" math, science, and reading in a gamified way.

Let Google create a digital profile of you and allow the YouTube algorithm to lead you down a destructive path full of inappropriate content.

Lastly, when you use the school approved apps, you Consent for EdTech to steal and sell your information because in their privacy agreements most say:

QUOTE "When you access or use our Service, you are deemed to consent to the collection, use, retention, transfer, structuring, manipulation, storage, transmission and/or disclosure of your information." END QUOTE.

Most importantly though, kids, you must sign a digital compliance agreement not to "misuse" the drug-like devices that are designed to be addictive that we allow at our school.

As a former high school teacher and a mother of four children, it's alarming why I constantly have to prove with scientific research why this invasive technology is detrimental to our kids when nobody in the field of education can prove why it was beneficial to be introduced in the first place.

Why did we allow schools to become Silicon Valley Profit Centers?

Why did we replace human interaction with machines?

Why did we replace pencil and paper with keyboards, and physical books with digital ones?

Why did we force our children to stare at a screen for 7 hours a day when we had zero research on what it would do to their eyes, their brains, and their humanity?

Technology (as it's currently being used) is not the future of education, it is the demise of education.

You have a golden opportunity, as Dennis recently mentioned, for "Kansas to be a lighthouse for the nation".

Save the current generation and all those that follow by **eliminating** the 1:1 tech programs in our schools and by **prohibiting** distracting & addictive personal devices for the entire school day.

Then, and only then, will we be well on our way toward educational equity, transformative classrooms, and flourishing human beings.

Thank you.

Emily Brownlee
Overland Park, KS

JOHNSON COUNTY
KANSAS
Mental Health

Testimony by Tim DeWeese, Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center to the House Committee on Education in support of House Bill 2421

Concerning the prohibition of student use of personal electronic communication devices during the school day, limitations on staff-student social media communication, and screen-time reporting for early grade levels

Friday, January 16

Chairperson Estes and members of the committee, my name is Tim DeWeese, and I serve as the Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in **support** of HB 2421.

Johnson County Mental Health Center began operating in 1962, initially providing outpatient services with four employees in one location. Today, we have over 500 employees in six locations throughout Johnson County delivering community-based mental health and substance use treatment services to tens-of-thousands of residents annually. We are a department of Johnson County Government, licensed by the State of Kansas as a Community Mental Health Center (CMHC), accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International and certified as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) by the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS).

From a mental health perspective, constant access to personal electronic devices during the school day contributes to distraction, social pressure and emotional dysregulation. Smartphones and similar devices are designed to capture and hold attention, but they often pull students away from learning and in-person interaction, keeping their attention in the wrong place.

When students are not continually managing notifications and social pressures during classroom time, they are better able to focus, participate and build the interpersonal skills that support long-term mental health. The abilities to sustain attention, regulate emotions and build relationships are foundational to both academic success and lifelong well-being.

The bill also takes an important step by limiting social media communication between school staff and students. Clear, professional boundaries are essential to maintaining safe and supportive learning environments, and communication should occur through structured, transparent and school-approved channels.

Because the provisions in this bill will support student focus, emotional well-being and healthy social development, Johnson County Mental Health Center supports HB 2421 and asks the members of the committee to recommend its passage.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Tim DeWeese, LMSW
Director, Johnson County Mental Health Center

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Anthony Dummermuth
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
7700 Shawnee Mission Parkway
Overland Park KS
913-439-9922

My name is Anthony Dummermuth, I have 3 children who have graduated from Shawnee Mission North High School, I have 2 there right now, and 1 at Hocker Grove Middle School. We have really loved the district and the schools as a whole and are committed to high quality public education.

I'm also a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in KS working with adolescents and families in both a private practice setting and in a small therapeutic residential program where teens live, receive therapy, mentoring, and do schoolwork for approximately 8-10 months as they and their families do the work of healing and reconciliation.

The adolescents and families I work with are a diverse group but also mostly normal people, they could be you or I. They are good parents and good kids going through a challenging time. One thing all the students have in common, and I do mean all, is unhealthy, harmful, or overuse of smart phones and/or social media, and parents trying to understand how to set limits on the use of it. Most parents wish they could start over with these devices, not realizing that in the hands of developing youth, they easily lead to unhealthy behaviors and declining mental health.

We are now counseling and educating a generation who have always known smart phones and social media. And though some voices offered warning, we did not realize the impact these would have on young people whose brains are still going through crucial periods of development. Through improper use, overuse, and too early of use, developmental milestones become threatened.

Young people right now are having more trouble focusing for significant periods of time, unable to listen and be present in class, in conversations, or for such things as simply reading an actual book. This is largely do to the onslaught of smart phones and social media taking over their everyday lives. With the flood of random information online, what is truly important and of value to learn becomes lost or indecipherable.

Alongside of this, a crucial task of the teenage years has always been identity formation which has mostly occurred by drawing from the values of communities, families, and religious or spiritual traditions. Today however, young people are more likely to try to construct an identity based of Tik Tok trends, influencers, or whatever else is fed to them by algorithms and endless internet searches.

Relationships are also suffering. Close relationships are one of the best predictors of happiness and when those get more and more substituted by online "friends" or "followers" connection decreases. Quality loses out to quantity and long stretches of in person interaction gets lost.

For teens the longest periods of time when they are with actual people, is at school. It's where friendships, sometimes lifelong friendships, form. It is where students interact with adults who are interested in them, where they learn to be a part of a larger community, and where they begin to discover what they are good at.

The residential program I am a part of gives me a first hand look at what happens when teens get a long break from devices and social media. They learn how to cope with difficulty in new

ways, how to deal with boredom, cultivate creativity, make eye contact, rediscover activities they used to enjoy, and learn to have authentic relationships.

Our schools have a unique opportunity to provide a long oasis and refuge from the constant notifications, the pressure to respond, like, stay up to date on the most trivial events, and to help our students regain a youth not dominated by a screen. I believe this will result in improved mental health, improved relationships, and therefore improved learning. Please make our schools phone free. Thank you!

I'm old enough to remember sitting in restaurants as a child and breathing in the smoke of those around me. Back then, people thought smoking only hurt the smoker. I remember the grumbles when the laws were changed! The changes came in stages. The first was creating "smoking" and "non-smoking" sections of restaurants; even as a child that seemed like nonsense. After all, the smoke didn't care what part of the restaurant it went to. Eventually, the adults caught up to what every child knew and the smokers went outside.

The arguments on banning smoking indoors led to heated debates. There were the usual individual freedoms versus good-of-society debate and Big Tabacco brought their economic impact arguments. In the end, though, it was decided the health of children and the benefit to society was more important than the inconvenience to an individual or the profits of a company.

Eventually everyone understood the science behind secondhand smoke. And now we look back and wonder how they ever blew so much smoke around so many innocent lungs.

The laws banned it. The science backed it. Behaviors changed to follow the law. Society changed its views on the behavior.

The same is true of personal devices in schools. But the impact on children is not on their lungs. It's on their brains. I started speaking out over a decade ago on how screens and brains don't mesh well, especially the younger the brain is. I can't think of one part of the brain untouched: it impacts the prefrontal cortex (executive functions), the limbic system (feelings and memory), the frontal and occipital lobes (reading, speaking, comprehension). And it's clear, more time on screens equals more problems.

So far, many personal device bans in school are akin to early smoking bans. We're in the "Do you want to sit in the Smoking or the Non-Smoking Section?" phase. These bans seldom work.

When personal devices are accessible during the school day, even if only during breaks and between classes students live in a state of Continuous Partial Attention. When students know they can access their device every 45 minutes they must try to concentrate on their teacher while simultaneously wondering what they might be missing out on. Or, as is often the case, concentrate on the teacher while stressing about what they just saw on their phones during the passing period. Or even worse, knowing there is some drama that they feel they must resolve as soon as possible but can't because they had to put their phone away for class. It's as if they have one foot in the classroom and one in the digital world. It fractures learning, attention and memory while increasing stress.

When these partial bans are in place we ask them to carry a heavy load. "Just don't think about that thing in your pocket that you can get to as soon as the bell rings." That's a big

ask. As an adult, can you do it? If you bring your phone into a meeting and it buzzes but you know you are not supposed to look at it, can you ignore it? Doesn't it divert your attention even if just for a moment? And if you do manage to ignore it there is a price your brain pays for that interruption. You likely miss what was said. It will impact your memory. There is a little bit of increased stress. Or maybe you're in session and feeling bored or frustrated so you pull out your phone to distract yourself or send a message. My point is, as adults we do not manage this technology as well as we wish we did. How can we ask our children to do more?

This is not a case of "they have to learn how to manage it." They can't. Big Tech, like the Big Tabacco of my childhood, has made sure it comes out on the winning end. The brains of our children are bombarded in ways that fracture their attention and their emotions, it is increasing their stress and anxiety. I didn't even touch on what it's doing to them socially. It's up to the adults to make school into a space where they can learn and relate to one another in real life. It's time for us to decide to follow in the footsteps of the smoking bans and realize that the health of our children and the benefit to society is more important than the inconvenience to an individual or the profits of a company.

Please give educators and administrators something to fall back on. Give kids the chance to learn in a distraction-free environment. And give society a chance to catch up. Because our children have really big problems to solve. And they won't be able to do it if they aren't given the chance to learn.

Thank you.

Susan Dunaway, LCPC, Neurotherapist

Chief Neuroscience Officer - Brain Health & Learning

Kids Digital Health Hub | Screen Guardians