

Virtual Proponent Testimony of HB 2421

For the House Education Committee

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Good afternoon! Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 302 on behalf of Smartphone Free Childhood US.

My name is Kevin Cronister. I'm a newly retired ICAC Task Force Detective with 15 years of law enforcement experience. I spent the last 7 years of my career investigating nothing but internet facilitated crimes against children through the Internet Crimes against Children (ICAC) Task Force. I'm a board-Certified Expert in Cyber Investigations (CECI) through the McAfee Institute and have worked hundreds of these cases throughout my career. I want to spend my brief time drawing your attention to three important points about cell phone usage by children in schools:

- 1) Based on my experience, I've identified that much of the conversations between predators and children take place in two high-risk locations: Their bedrooms late at night and at school. You obviously have no control over the first, as the parents have to do their part by keeping cell phones out of bedrooms. However, we can make a huge impact by preventing students from accessing their personal devices while at school. Kids have enough freedom at school to sneak away briefly with their device to communicate in private while not being worried about parental involvement.
- 2) I've seen several cases where one victim was turned into multiple because the child introduced the predator to friends while at school, oftentimes at the predator's request. Predators can use the social aspect of school to obtain additional contact information or social media information from the victim's friends, giving them additional children to groom. I even had a case where a predator talked a victim into taking photos of other children in the locker room while changing to send to him.
- 3) Lastly, in many instances when a child shares a nude or intimate photo of a classmate with others, it occurs at school. This is also because the child has enough freedom at school to sneak away and message others while not being worried about parental involvement. They are also more likely to engage in this type of behavior because of the encouragement of their peers.

To conclude, preventing students from accessing their cell phones or personal devices during school hours will eliminate a high-risk opportunity that gives predators access to children away from parental involvement and gives children the opportunity to make impulsive decisions due to encouragement from peers.