

## **Testimony to the House Education Committee**

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Written Only Opponent for Bill HB 2421

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Chair Estes and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to bill HB 2421 as it is currently written. I'm sharing my reasons for opposition as well as some suggested improvements if the bill does move forward.

As a parent of two kids who were in school when cell phone usage among adolescents really took off, I appreciate the intent and spirit behind this legislation and agree that excessive cell phone use during the school day can be disruptive to learning and student engagement. Creating a focused, supportive learning environment is a goal we all share.

However, I oppose this bill as written for two primary reasons because it:

- Removes local control from school districts that have intimate knowledge of community needs and challenges.
- Creates significant logistical challenges and an unfunded mandate when learning time and school budgets are already stretched thin.

I'm especially opposed to this unfunded mandate after seeing the potential costs of \$13.4 million in the fiscal note.

### **Local Control Is Working**

Most Kansas school districts have already implemented strong and thoughtful cell phone restrictions tailored to their local needs. These policies vary appropriately based on school size, grade level, staffing capacity, and community input. Local boards, administrators, educators, and families are best positioned to determine how cell phone use should be managed in their schools.

A one-size-fits-all statewide mandate risks undermining solutions that are already working and removes flexibility from districts that may need to shift approaches or provide different approaches for elementary, middle, and high school students.

### **Unfunded Mandate and Logistical Challenges**

This bill also presents serious logistical and financial concerns. If districts are required to securely collect, store, and return thousands of student cell phones each day, they will need to purchase equipment such as lockable storage systems, pouches, lockers, or other security solutions. Many districts will also need additional staff time to manage these systems safely and efficiently.

At the same time, Kansas schools are already absorbing a special education funding shortfall from the state. Districts are covering these costs out of general education budgets, leaving fewer resources available for classroom instruction, mental health supports, and staff retention. Adding a new, unfunded requirement places further strain on already limited resources.

### **Suggested Improvements and Amendments**

If the Legislature wishes to move forward on this issue, I urge consideration of the following amendments:

- Preserve local control by allowing districts to adopt or maintain their own cell phone policies that meet general state guidelines rather than mandating a single statewide approach.
- Provide dedicated state funding for any required equipment, staffing, or administrative costs associated with enforcement.
- Allow flexibility for grade-level differentiation, emergency situations, medical needs, and accommodations for students with disabilities.
- Include a phased implementation timeline to allow districts time to plan, budget, and engage families and staff.

### **Conclusion**

While I share the goal of reducing classroom distractions and supporting student learning, this bill goes too far by imposing a costly, inflexible mandate on local schools. Kansas districts are already taking this issue seriously and should be trusted to continue doing so in ways that best serve their students and communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose HB 2421 as written or significantly amend it to address these concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

**Erin Woods**