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Kansas Action for Children
Oral Proponent Testimony for HB 2421- Bell-to-Bell Cell Phone Limits
House Committee on Education

Chair Estes and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide **proponent testimony in support of House Bill 2421** on behalf of Kansas Action for Children.

Kansas children are experiencing unprecedented challenges, and technology is a significant contributing factor. The research and data on the potential harm and impact of digital devices on children's well-being is compelling and requires us all to consider new ways to help change the trajectory of how technology is impacting kids.

Schools that have already implemented bell-to-bell cell phone restrictions are beginning to see positive signs that many of these negative impacts are receding and that children are experiencing improved relationships, mental well-being, and educational achievement.

We have more work to do to consider how kids are interacting with technology – and we know they need to be prepared to engage with its vast potential. For the sake of our children, it should be better designed to enable curiosity and learning instead of addiction, distraction, and danger.

For the most part, the burden of protecting kids from the dangers of technology, the internet, and social media has mostly fallen on kids themselves, their parents, and educators. Social media companies and the like have failed to design their products with children's well-being as a priority. To protect kids and strengthen their ability to learn healthy habits and behaviors around digital devices, we need to collectively work together in a proactive approach.

HB 2421's bell-to-bell cell phone restriction is an essential step that not only helps minimize the constant access to smartphones for children, but it puts in place measures that help protect one of the most important activities of childhood – gaining an education.

Digital devices interfere with so many critical aspects of children's development, and schools should thoughtfully consider how technology is integrated into a student's day. As a society, we've become lax about the frequency and situations in which we're handing over devices to children.

"After its release in 2010, the iPad quickly became a staple of young children's daily lives. It was in this brief period, from 2010 to 2015, that childhood in America was

rewired into a form that was more sedentary, solitary, virtual, and incompatible with healthy human development.”¹ – *Johnathan Haidt, leading researcher on effects of technologies impact on children’s well-being*

We know that this is often where it begins. For example, it has become normalized for young children to have tablets; this often progresses to earlier and earlier introduction to other digital devices. By the time children reach junior high, they often have their own personal smartphone that is nearly always within reach.

Adolescence is a precarious and precious time for children to develop and learn more about themselves. **Children who are more often exposed to frequent social media and internet access are vulnerable to more social comparison, self-consciousness, online bullying, and chronic anxiety than children in past generations.** This exposure could lead to a chronic state of stress, which undermines healthy brain and social development – and puts more children into frequent fight or flight response mode, creating less resiliency to handle difficult life circumstances.

As noted in the U.S. Surgeon General’s Report in 2023 on Social Media and Youth Mental Health, “Brain development is a critical factor to consider when assessing the risk for harm. Adolescents, ages 10 to 19, are undergoing a highly sensitive period of brain development. This is a period when risk-taking behaviors reach their peak, when well-being experiences the greatest fluctuations, and when mental health challenges such as depression typically emerge. Furthermore, in early adolescence, when identities and sense of self-worth are forming, brain development is especially susceptible to social pressures, peer opinions, and peer comparison.”²

Children are struggling, as the increase in both mental health diagnoses and suicides show. According to the Kansas Health Institute’s Report on Suicide Among Adolescents and Youth in Kansas³, the key findings are alarming:

- Kansas had the 10th highest suicide rate in the nation for youths age 15-24 and the 11th highest for early adolescents age 10-14 in 2016-2020.
- Suicide was the second leading cause of death for Kansas early adolescents age 10-14 and youths age 15-24 in 2016-2020.

¹ Haidt, Jonathan. (March 13, 2024.) *End the Phone-Based Childhood Now*. The Atlantic.

² Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (2023). *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory*. Washington (DC): US Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK594759/>.

³ Beckman, Wyatt. (December 22, 2022). *Suicide Among Adolescents and Youth in Kansas*. Kansas Health Institute. <https://www.khi.org/articles/suicide-among-adolescents-and-youths-in-kansas/>

- The Kansas youth suicide rate increased 63.8%, from 13.0 per 100,000 population in 2001-2005, to 21.3 per 100,000 in 2016-2020, which outpaced the 41.1% increase in the United States overall (9.9 to 14.0 per 100,000).

Parents are also struggling. Nearly 70% of parents say that parenting is now more difficult than it was 20 years ago, with technology and social media as the two top cited reasons.⁴ (See Chart C.) Parents are also experiencing many of the same negative impacts of digital devices, creating more pressure and stress as they manage not only their own digital devices and social media, but also those of their children.

Individual digital device use is not intrinsically bad – it’s how and to what extent it is causing us to lose that healthy balance. International education studies have shown that overuse and misuse of digital devices is negatively associated with academic performance.⁵ And two neuroscientists found that “smartphone use can be disruptively habitual, with the main detrimental consequence being an inability to exert prolonged mental effort.”⁶

All of this to say, passing a consistent policy will ensure that rules apply to all school districts, and students and parents can expect a distraction-free learning environment. We expect improved educational achievement and mental well-being for Kansas kids because of the policy and a proactive focus on the impact of technology on children’s development.

I encourage you to amend the bill so that it matches the Senate version, SB 302, and **I ask that you pass the amended bill so that all Kansas kids get the same chance to experience a school day free from the distractions of their devices.** The consistency of a state statute will also help school districts, teachers, and parents enforce what can be a challenging policy when it’s inconsistently or subjectively applied. With HB 2421, Kansas can join the movement across the nation to help our next generation find a healthier way to handle their digital devices.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic. You can reach me at adrienne@kac.org if you have any additional questions.

About Kansas Action for Children

KAC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. KAC does not receive any funding from local, state, or federal government sources; however, we have a keen interest in the state budget because of its impact on children and families.

⁴ Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (2023). *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory*. Washington (DC): US Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK594759/>. Footnote 89 from Auxier, B., Anderson, M., Perrin, A., & Turner, E. (2020). *Parenting Children in the Age of Screens*. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech.

⁵ OECD. (2023). *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I)*. PISA, OECD Publishing.

⁶ Haidt, Jonathan. (June 5, 2024). *Get Phones Out of Schools Now*. The Atlantic.

Key Data

Chart A⁷

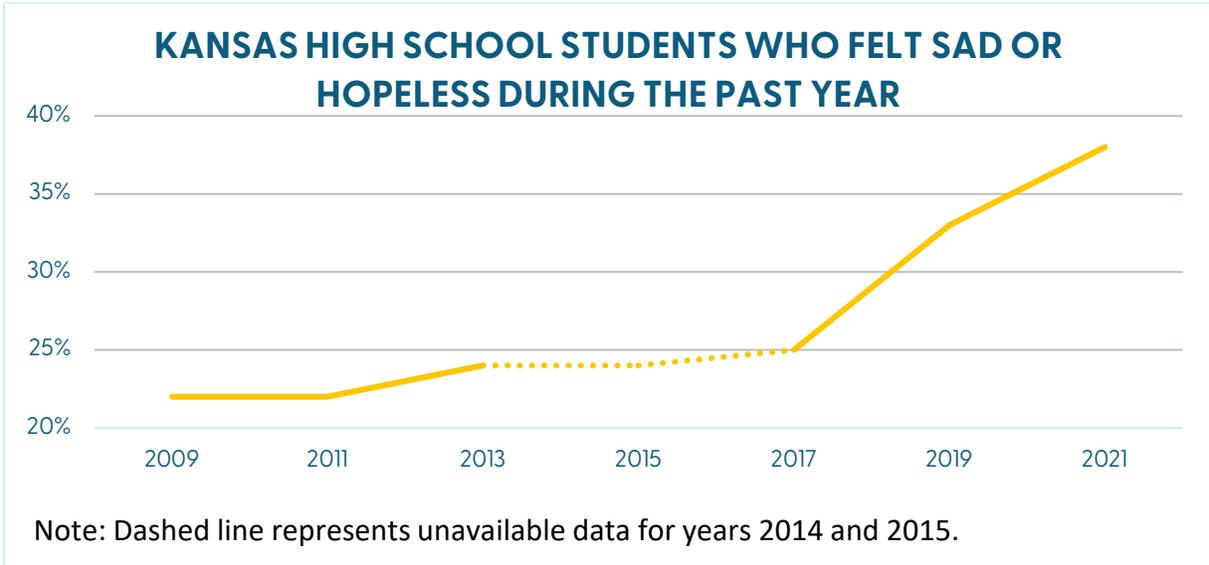
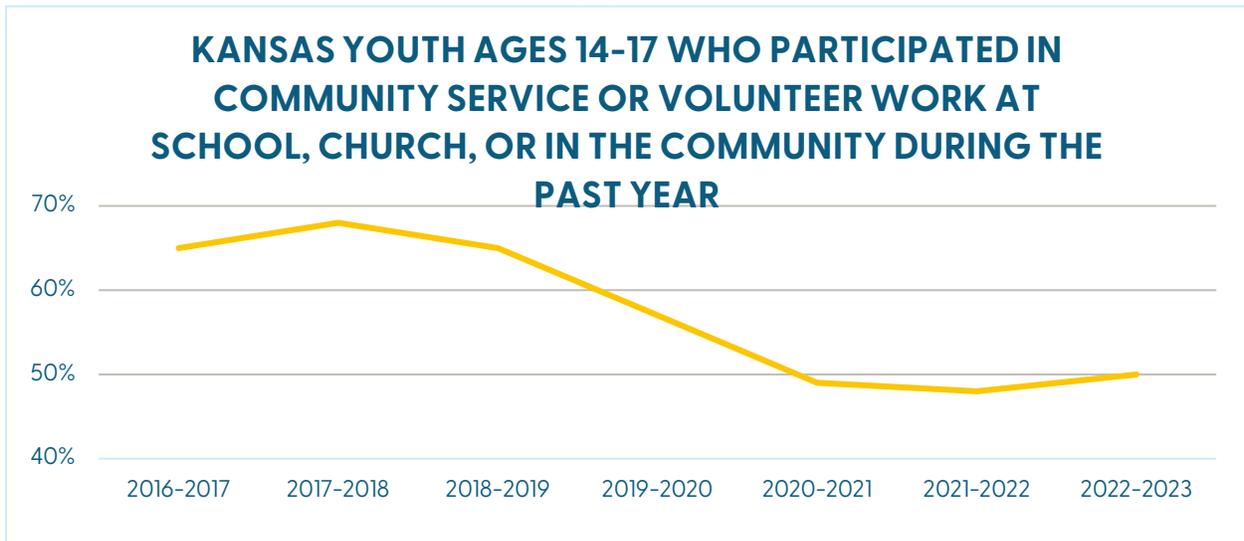


Chart B⁸



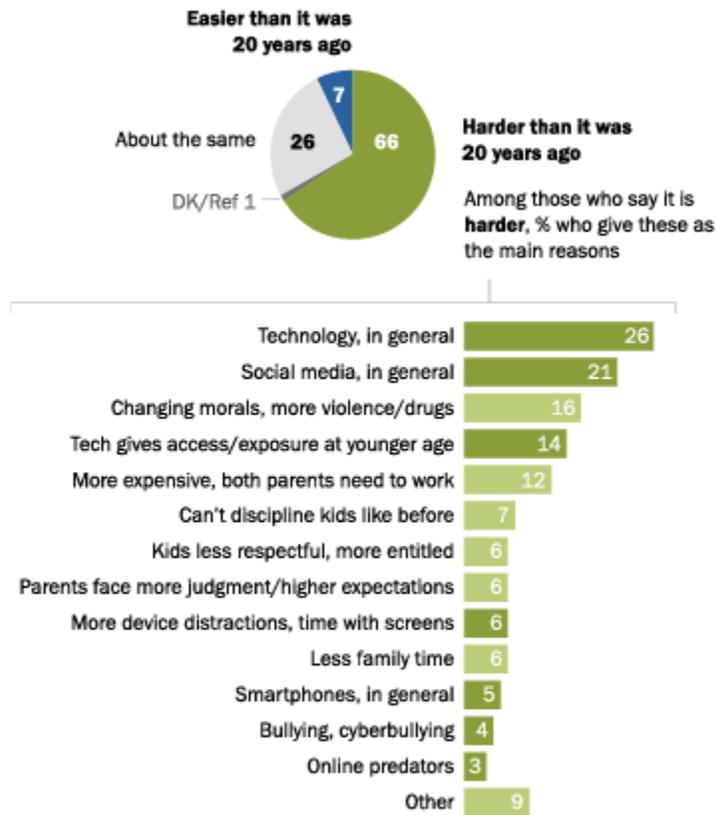
⁷ KIDS COUNT Data Center. (December 2025). *PRB analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data.* <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11203-high-school-students-who-felt-sad-or-hopeless-during-the-past-year?loc=18&loct=2#detailed/2/18/false/2545,2048,1729,871,573,36,867,38/any/21588>

⁸ KIDS COUNT Data Center. (December 2024). *Analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, National Survey of Children's Health.* <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11197-youth-ages-14-to-17-who-participated-in-community-service-or-volunteer-work-at-school-church-or-in-the-community-during-the-past-year?loc=18&loct=2#detailed/2/18/false/2490,2105,2043,1769,1696,1648,1603/any/21582>

Chart C⁹

A majority of parents today say parenting is harder today than two decades ago, with many citing technology as a reason why

% of U.S. parents who say that for most parents, parenting is ...



Note: Based on parents who have at least one child under the age of 18 but may also have an adult child or children. Those who did not give an answer are not shown. Verbatim responses have been coded into categories and figures may add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 2-15, 2020.
"Parenting Children in the Age of Screens"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

⁹ Auxier, B., Anderson, M., Perrin, A., & Turner, E. (2020). *Parenting Children in the Age of Screens*. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech.