



March 8, 2024

Dear Members of the House Education Policy Committee:

NAMI Minnesota is supporting HF4581 which will require schools to develop a policy on students' possession and use of cell phones in school. We support the development of a policy to promote good mental health.

The constant use of cell phones in schools presents several problems. First, they are a distraction to learning. Multi-tasking is not easy and looking at your phone makes it harder to concentrate on what is being taught in the classroom and can prevent a student from completing a task or assignment. Second, they can promote the continued use of social media during the school day. Unfortunately, students are bullied through social media and the constant onslaught of posts, especially negative ones, can be harmful to students' mental health. The use of phones to take photos in places like locker rooms could lead to harassment or revealing photos being shared. The Pew Research Center found that 49% of 15-17 year olds have experienced some form of cyberbullying. Third, the use of cell phones deters human interaction. Texting is not the same as talking with someone. During the high school years in particular, it's important to develop social skills. This involves human to human interaction, not texting or posting on social media.

There are important issues to address in this policy, such as making sure we do not increase punishments for using a cell phone, especially suspensions. That would be counterproductive. We also need to take into consideration a student may need it as an accommodation such as using a CALM app or being able to contact someone when a panic attack occurs.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our support and thoughts on this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director



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