



# North Dakota Senate

STATE CAPITOL  
600 EAST BOULEVARD  
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



## Senator Mike Wobbema

District 24  
11829 31st Street SE  
Valley City, ND, 58072-9709  
[mwobbema@ndlegis.gov](mailto:mwobbema@ndlegis.gov)

## COMMITTEES:

Education  
Workforce Development (Chair)

29 January 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. For the record, I am Senator Mike Wobbema, District 24, and I am submitting testimony in favor of an amended SB 2354.

This past summer and fall, I attended conferences that spoke to the issue of students having access to personal electronic devices in school. It was a topic of special emphasis, expressing the level of concern, and desire for solutions. The actions of reducing, or preferably, eliminating, the use of those devices in schools has shown positive and promising results.

Social media organizations are on record in admitting that their products are intended to be addicting. Data shows that the average American teen spends more than 5 hours a day on social media, usually on their phones, often in schools, and research shows that three or more hours a day on social media doubles kids' risk of mental health problems. You have heard testimony on the increase in self-harm and mental health issues among our students since smartphones became widespread. School leaders have told us that there is a need for more mental health services, and the shortage of mental health professionals makes addressing this trend even more difficult. School halls are quiet as students shuffle from one class to another with their eyes glued to a screen. To quote US Surgeon General, Vevek Murthy; "We are in the middle of a national youth mental health crisis, and I am concerned that social media is an important driver of that crisis -- one that we must urgently address." Articles from publications such as: School Climate & Safety states, "Digital distractions in class linked to lower academic performance," and NEA News; "The Epidemic of Anxiety Among Today's Students: By high school and college, many students have run out of steam. Anxiety -- the mental-health tsunami of their generation -- has caught up with them, and further, from an article by Sarah P. Weeldreyer; "Social media and smartphones have tipped an entire generation into anxiety and depression. Is there anything to be done?"

But there are success stories out there. Also at these conferences, story after story was told of significant improvement of student engagement when personal electronic devices were secured. Mental health issues have been reduced, personal interaction increased and improved, participation in class improved, there has been an increase in participation in school activities such as clubs and sports, academic progress improved, and the

general mood in the whole school has become noticeably more positive. Recently, I spoke with the Superintendent of the Valley City Public School system. They have implemented a no phone policy, and the results have been very promising. Even the students have come to him expressing their appreciation for implementing their program. But we must do more. Addiction by its very nature requires intervention of some sort. An addict isn't capable of self-control in eliminating or reducing their need for a fix. For some students, merely saying that they must turn off their personal electronic devices or leave them in their locker won't be the necessary step to gain success. They can't help it... they're addicted. By taking the steps outlined in an amended SB 2354, we set the stage for our students' success in improving the many aspects of their lives that cause us concern and are the subject of discussion in these halls. This is a Bill about our students, and our future. Their mental health and resiliency, their academic success, their ability to positively interact with each other and society, along with other concerns we frequently strive to address in the halls of the State Legislature are all at stake.

For emphasis, it is not enough to have these personal electronic devices put away during class time. If the students know they have the ability to check immediately after class what has transpired during class, they will continue to be distracted during that class. Remember, this is an addiction, and they will want their next fix. By enacting the requirements of this piece of legislation, we are setting the stage for improving the aforementioned mental health, social interaction and academic issues that the distraction of these devices inhibits. Concerns such as security and access between parent and child are diversions from the real issue. Having access to personal electronic devices is not a necessity and presents the likelihood of being a hindrance in these cases. At the risk of sounding cliché, we seemed to do just fine in those areas of protest before these devices came along. This Bill is not intended to restrict legitimate necessary access during the school day for those students who may need unique consideration. Is this a perfect solution? Probably not. But data shows that taking steps such as this shows dramatic improvement in those areas of our students progress that are measured and are of particular concern.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I strongly urge you to incorporate the amendment into SB 2354 and ask for your thoughtful consideration of a DO PASS. Thank you for your attention to this, and I will stand for any questions.