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Subject The case for banning smart phones in Massachusetts schools

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New from CommonWealth Beacon

SHELTER FALLOUT: While the Senate voted to advance a bill that would allocate \$425 million in funding for emergency shelter services but cap the length of stay and the number of families that can access assistance, the holdouts are expressing concern that the proposals to tighten eligibility and screening don't go far enough. Maya Mitchell has the story.

NEW CONTRACT: The MBTA's contract with Keolis Commuter Services, the company that has operated and maintained the commuter rail system since 2014, expires in June 2027. As the MBTA prepares to put out a request for proposals, officials will have to make a key decision: Will they want a bundled contract in which one operator handles everything from operating trains to maintaining the infrastructure of the system or an unbundled contract in which multiple companies handle different parts of the system. Gin Dumcius explains.

OPINION: Harvard, MIT, Mass General Brigham and other members of the "Consortium for Climate Solutions" are touting their efforts to develop solar and wind farms out of state. But they need to focus on the fossil fuel plant that powers Harvard Medical School and its affiliated hospitals and spews pollution into nearby Boston neighborhoods, writes Regina LaRocque, Mariel Tai Sander, Avi Cohen and Madeleine Kline.

The case for banning smart phones in Massachusetts schools

February 17, 2025

By **COMMONWEALTH BEACON STAFF**

On Feb. 3, the Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics published a study that found adolescents are spending one and a half hours a day at school on their smartphones. And what they're doing during that time

online isn't surprising. They're on messaging platforms, Instagram, video streaming services and email.

The findings come at a time of deep scrutiny over how cell phones are affecting children and their mental health. Nearly all children between the ages of 13 and 17 have a cell phone, according to Pew Research, and teachers are increasingly reporting that smartphones are disrupting learning. The devices – along with social media – are making it harder for students to concentrate, persevere through problems, and develop meaningful relationships with their peers.

It's against this backdrop that more than a dozen states – from Florida to California – have prohibited cell phones in schools or required district officials to come up with their own restrictive policies. In Massachusetts, at least seven bills designed to curb cell phone usage during school hours have been introduced this legislative session.

In this week's episode of the Codcast, *CommonWealth Beacon* editor Laura Colarusso talks with state Sen. John Velis about his bill to ban cell phones during school – the Act to Protect Children's Learning, Focus, and Emotional Health During School Hours – and the pressure that social media exerts on children.

[LISTEN TO THE CODCAST](#)

More from CommonWealth Beacon

ECONOMIC SHOCK: Massachusetts's vaunted “eds and meds” sector has powered the region's economy and enjoyed a degree of insulation from the ups and downs of economic cycles. But, that now seems turned on its head, as the things that have been mainstays of the Massachusetts economy face sudden headwinds from a flurry of policy directives from the new Trump administration. Michael Jonas reports.

FUNDING FREEZE: In the same week a federal judge reiterated that all federal funding be disbursed as appropriated by Congress, yet more grants – the latest targeting emissions from diesel engines – became unavailable to Massachusetts state agencies as part of the Trump administration's funding freeze. Bhaamati Borkhetaria has the details.

TOBACCO TAMP-DOWN: Cities and towns are cracking down on youth tobacco use with five new communities adopting nicotine-free generation policies and four putting restrictions on nicotine pouches – a popular product among younger people and the fastest-growing segment of the US tobacco market – in just the past three months. Bhaamati Borkhetaria explains the trend.

OPINION: Massachusetts has elected a Black governor, a Black attorney general, Black state senators and state representatives. There are Black heads of departments and secretariats. But, there are not many Black lobbyists on Beacon Hill. Daniel Delaney explains why it's important to have more people working in the State House with an expansive view of Black possibilities.

journalism.

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What We're Reading

- **TRANSPORTATION:** Were the MBTA shutdowns to improve service successful? A new report tries to answer that question. (WBUR)
- **HEALTH:** In Massachusetts, hospitalizations for flu are at their highest level since 2022. About 16,000 people have died from the flu this year nationwide, according to the CDC. (GBH News)
- **ECONOMY:** John Snow Inc., a Boston-based global public health nonprofit, laid off more than 1,000 employees in the wake of the federal freeze on funding for international aid. (*Boston Business Journal*)
- **FDA:** Employees who work in the US Food and Drug Administration's divisions overseeing food, medical devices and tobacco products learned over the weekend that their jobs had been eliminated. (*Associated Press*)
- **EDUCATION:** Northeastern University has to repay the National Science Foundation \$616,695 after an audit found the school had charged unallowable expenses to its federally funded research projects. (*Boston Globe*)

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