



**Assembly Committee on Education  
Testimony in Opposition to Assembly Bill 948  
February 5, 2026**

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Patrick Rau, and I serve as Superintendent of the Peshtigo School District. Peshtigo is a small community in northeastern Wisconsin, located in the manufacturing heart of Marinette County.

A few brief points about our district provide important context:

- We serve approximately 1,050 students, with nearly 20 percent attending our schools through open enrollment.
- Our students demonstrate respect for their school and one another; notably, we have never needed to install locks on hallway lockers.
- In a district survey conducted in winter 2025, 90 percent of parents, 90 percent of students, and 83 percent of staff agreed or strongly agreed that they feel safe on our campus.

I want to begin by acknowledging the intent behind Assembly Bill 948. We all share the goal of creating safe, focused learning environments for students. Distraction is a legitimate concern, and school leaders take that responsibility seriously. However, I must respectfully oppose AB 948 because a bell-to-bell cell phone mandate removes local flexibility at precisely the moments when professional judgment and student safety matter most.

Our district recently experienced a serious and potentially tragic incident. During the school day, Peshtigo High School hosted an American Red Cross blood drive on campus. The event was open to the public and students were able to volunteer at the blood drive. During the event, a student used their cell phone to immediately report a credible concern. That communication enabled school staff and local authorities to respond quickly and decisively.

As a result, police arrested a man on campus who was carrying a loaded handgun, a magazine concealed inside his shirt, and two knives. After being taken into custody, the individual later escaped his handcuffs and assaulted multiple law enforcement officers. This was a situation that could have become every parent's and educator's worst nightmare.

AB 948 would impose a one-size-fits-all requirement that does not reflect the real-world conditions schools face each day. As districts continually train and prepare for emergencies, we know that:

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- The most effective approach to school safety begins with a “*See Something, Say Something*” culture.
- Cell phones are often the fastest way for students to report danger, particularly in areas without landlines, such as bathrooms, gyms, and outdoor practice fields.
- They allow for immediate communication with staff, families, and emergency services.
- They provide a critical backup when landlines, radios, or internal communication systems fail.

When seconds matter, removing the option for responsible cell phone use is not a neutral choice, it introduces additional risk. Moreover, the emergency exemption included in the bill is not practical in real-world application. The most likely enforcement outcome would be students leaving phones at home, in their vehicles, or secured in an office, effectively removing access to communication tools from the very individuals we are trying to protect.

Like many districts across Wisconsin, Peshtigo already has policies in place that:

- Restrict inappropriate or disruptive use during instructional time,
- Establish clear consequences for misuse, and
- Allow flexibility when safety or special circumstances require it.

These policies are effective because they are responsive, situational, and grounded in professional judgment. Most importantly, they are supported by our students. Through Superintendent-Student Advisory Groups, students consistently report that the learning environment has improved with cell phones restricted during instruction, while also valuing responsible use to communicate with parents, employers, and siblings during lunch or between periods.

For students and families in Peshtigo, this issue ultimately comes down to safety. Our recent experience demonstrated that a student’s cell phone can make the difference between crisis and prevention. I respectfully urge you not to remove a tool that has already helped protect students, staff, and community members. Please allow school districts to continue balancing learning and safety through local decision-making.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,



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