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**February 9, 2023**

Ways and Means Committee

**RE: Support for HB 525: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot**

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Alexia Savold and I am an educator and parent who resides in Towson, Baltimore County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote skills and values that lead to environmental literacy, which supports goals of the *Maryland Partnership For Children In Nature* and the *K-12 Environmental Literacy Standards* required for graduation in Maryland.

I am currently the Assistant Director of The Nature Preschool at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills. I was an early childhood educator for 5 years at The Nature Preschool and my three children were also students at the Nature Preschool from 2014-2021. I am a big proponent of outdoor based early childhood education, especially now as we continue to live with the fallout of the COVID pandemic. I have witnessed firsthand the benefits of outdoor education in children and adults. Children become more self-sufficient and more confident when given space outside to play and learn social-emotional skills. Watching a child climb a tree or go over a big log all by themselves is priceless. Their

self-confidence grows and they are more willing to try new things more often! This self-confidence guides them when they enter kindergarten- they are ready to try the very challenging skills of reading and writing as well as coping with the many social-emotional challenges of being in a kindergarten classroom. Providing an opportunity for more programs to be licensed will allow more children to experience the benefits of nature based education, especially families who it would otherwise not be an option either financially or logistically since the current outdoor preschools are only available for a few hours each day and can be cost prohibitive.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB525!

Sincerely,

Alexia D Savold

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