

MICHELE GUYTON
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Environment and Transportation
Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB525 Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program-Establishment

FAVORABLE

March 22, 2023

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,

I am writing to respectfully request a favorable report on HB525 – Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Program – Establishment. This bill instructs the MSDE Office of Childcare to establish a limited pilot in order to study the feasibility of licensure for forest and nature preschool programs. In addition, the MSDE will collect data and report findings of this initial licensing phase to determine whether to expand the program. The purpose of this pilot program is to both increase access to affordable, high quality early learning programs and to extend the benefits of nature-based learning to families who prefer that choice.

Priority for participation in the Pilot will be given to existing programs in areas where there are limited early childcare options and should include urban, suburban and rural areas. Specific guidelines for child safety and hygiene are also specified in the bill and are adapted from a similar program in Washington State.

The benefits to academic, social, and emotional development from participation in a nature-based educational model are well documented and these programs already exist in Maryland. There are close to 60 programs listed on the Natural Start Alliance website. These nature-based programs, however, are limited in their hours of operation and in the families that they can serve because they cannot be licensed under current MSDE regulations. They will also not be able to participate in our mixed-delivery Pre-K programs. This emerging and promising sector of our early childhood education community are here asking to be elevated and held to similar standards as other licensed early childhood programs. I urge a favorable report on HB525 to expand access to high quality, innovative, data-supported preschool programs in Maryland.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Delegate Michele Guyton".

Delegate Michele Guyton D42B