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BILL NO.: **HB 525**

TITLE: **Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment**

SPONSOR: **Delegate Guyton**

COMMITTEE: **Ways and Means**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: **February 15, 2023**

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 525 – Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment. This legislation would establish a pilot program to license outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs.

Currently in Maryland, outdoor preschool and child-care programs cannot be licensed unless they have indoor classroom or learning space. This requirement is overly prohibitive and closes the door to otherwise high-quality nature-based learning opportunities for some of our youngest learners. Outdoor learning programs for preschool-aged students are generally defined by their immersive structure within a natural setting, with access to emergency shelter, as necessary. Outdoor preschools use professionally-developed curriculum and developmentally-appropriate learning practices in order to ensure they meet the same standards as traditional indoor, classroom based preschools. The only difference is that nature-based outdoor preschools operate in parks, on farms, and often at existing nature or environmental education centers – and unfortunately, are not currently afforded licensing.

Licensing is critical for these outdoor preschool programs for several reasons. Without licensing, outdoor preschools cannot offer full-day school options, creating a challenge for most working families. Furthermore, for families that rely on state support to afford quality pre-school, only accredited, licensed programs are eligible for such assistance. This reduces options for families who may desire a different kind of programming for their child. HB525 would address these concerns by establishing a pilot program to license outdoor preschool and child care programs to create a pathway for incorporation of these programs into the suite of options and opportunities for Maryland families.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 525. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.