
February 7, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Katelyn Rooney and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, Owings, MD.

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.

My oldest has attended an outdoor forest play nature program for over two years and my youngest has attended both that program and Little Bugs Nature Preschool for the past 6 months. Both of these programs have been instrumental in allowing my children the ability to learn not only those typically educational items associated with preschool, but also the added benefit of doing so while connecting with nature. Having the classroom be in nature allows for a greater experience of discovery, creativity,

and experiences that you couldn't otherwise find in a typical indoor classroom. Especially for children like my oldest, who is autistic, having greater flexibility in choosing the preschool experience that may best suit their needs is extremely important. A nature program like the ones my children have attended has allowed my children to develop and show growth that I don't think would have been possible in the traditional setting. My only wish is that these programs were both more readily available and more accessible for families with limited resources. Supporting this bill is the first step to making this a possibility for more children.

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!

Sincerely,

Katelyn Rooney

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