

**February 11, 2023**

Ways and Means Committee

**RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!**

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Mary Bryant-Jackson 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.

This issue is very important to my family and me. My 3-year-old daughter has been attending two outdoor preschools for the past 6 months. I chose these schools because my daughter loves nature, animals and being outside. I had no idea how, in just 6 months, my daughter would benefit from everything that she has gained and learned from these programs. My daughter's programs have given her a newfound confidence in her everyday life. The unconventional, outdoor classrooms have allowed my daughter to learn in a way I never thought

possible. It promotes her love of mother nature while fostering her learning of numbers and letters, etc. She has developed deeper critical thinking and fine/gross motor skills. I know that these programs would benefit so many children in our community as well as our state.

*I implore you to please vote in support of this bill.*

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,

Mary Bryant-Jackson

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