

February 8th, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Caitlin Rubush and I am a parent who resides in Anne Arundel County, Millersville, 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.

As a new parent, sending your child to their first school is extremely nerve wracking. Your mind runs wild with thoughts of “Will the teachers care for my child the way I do? Is my child safe? Will my child thrive? Is this school the right choice for my child's needs?” After only five months at Magothy Cooperative Preschool we know we found the right choice for our family. The sense of community that this small outdoor/indoor hybrid school has provided our family is unmatched. Each teacher we have encountered is so passionate about outdoor learning which translates to the teacher being passionate about the students like they were their own: their safety, their well being, and their needs. We know our child is in

the right environment to not only learn but to grow more resilient, have more self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence. All well developing a life-long love for the outdoors and the environment.

So please I urge you to vote in support of this bill to continue helping not only families but more importantly 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,

Caitlin Rubush

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