

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Rachael Tanner and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, 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.

Outdoor preschool has been SUCH a huge blessing to our family! Our Covid baby, who is now almost 3 is thriving. I don't think you'd ever know she was born in a time when we were all isolated and those social interactions that are so important weren't really ideal. I strongly feel like this has to do with being outside, in the fresh air, and playing with other kids. We moved from a county where there were only one or two outdoor preschools and they were very expensive! Our other kids didn't get the benefit of the outdoor school and we are so blessed to have found the one we attend now. We are even more blessed that we can afford it now. That isn't the case for a lot of families and it's really unfair to those kids! Outdoor preschools should have the support they deserve so that ALL children can have easier access to them.

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,

Rachael Tanner