
February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Jessica Kehl and I am an educator who resides in Anne Arundel County, Annapolis, 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.

I am an educator at Tree of Life Preschool at congregation Kol Shalom, a nature play preschool. My daughter, now five years old, has been enrolled at the school since she turned three. My younger daughter will attend as soon as she is old enough. I believe strongly that outdoor schools give children skills and aid in development in ways that are not achievable in traditional school environments. I believe that the benefits of outdoor preschool should be available to all children, but that is not the case

because access to these programs is not equitable. Lack of regulation and oversight keeps these programs at a disadvantage because there is no uniform standard for quality and training.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB525 to ensure that all children have equal access to outdoor preschool programs that are adequately and safely regulated.

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,

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