



02/12/2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Lisa Poe and I am a nature- based educator who resides in Calvert County, Prince Frederick, 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 have been a licensed family child care provider for the past ten year and during this time my program has evolved into a nature- based educational learning center. In my time as an educator I have met many students who would not succeed in a traditional program, they need the space to move, run, climb and be free. Many of these needs can not be fulfilled in a traditional program that runs inside, where children spend long periods being directed by teachers and it leaves little time for students to follow their interests and fulfill their sensory needs. I have noticed an influx of families reaching out for a program that does not fit the traditional model, they want their children to play outdoors and in nature. Nationwide movements such as 1000 hours outside is inspiring families all across the country to put down the technology and explore the great outdoors.

In my program I have seen my students thrive and grow resilient when playing in ALL weather. We believe that there is no such thing as bad weather when a program emphasizes the joy of raindrops on your face and splashing in puddles. My students are able to identify local birds, plants, trees and other native species and have become environmental stewards. We need them to love to earth before we can ask them to save it!

Every week I receive emails, calls and messages from families who are seeking an outdoor and nature-based program, where their child is allowed to be a CHILD. My waitlist is extremely long and it is my hope with the passing of this bill, we will create additional programs and spaces for students and families all across our state. As a family child care provider I am limited to serving only 8 children, with the passing of this bill and additional staff members I will be able to serve more families and students.

I am encourganing you to vote YES on this bill to change the future of our young children and make a difference!

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,

Lisa Poe

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