

February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Kimberly Haggard and I am a preschool educator who resides and works in Annapolis, 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.

I am lucky enough to be both the parent and an educator of students in an outdoor preschool. My son's time at his nature preschool was wonderful, and he grew and flourished socially, emotionally, and academically. He was extremely well-prepared for public elementary school when he entered Kindergarten in 2021. I have remained at the school as an educator and love watching our new students continue to flourish in many ways each year.

The outdoor program model is wonderful for all types and levels of preschoolers. As they develop their motor skills through outdoor play, they are also developing crucial parts of their brain, learning social skills, building resilience, and creating a life-long appreciation of the world around us.

I hope that you will vote in support of this bill and encourage your fellow lawmakers to do the same. It would be very beneficially for our community for more children to have access to outdoor preschools in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Kimberly P. Haggard

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