

**2-9-2023**

Ways and Means Committee

**RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!**

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

House Bill 525 is essential for the expansion of outdoor-based preschools for your youngest constituents. Both of my children, now ages 9 and 5, attended outdoor-based preschools. This time in nature fostered a love of learning and emotional intelligence. These skills will last a lifetime!

My five year-old can excitedly talk to you about invasive species of plants. Like any kid, she loves collecting rocks, but she can also identify quartzite versus shale. Kids are innately curious, and it seems like immersion in the sounds, scents, and textures of nature both satisfies and grows this curiosity. It's infectious, and my husband and I find ourselves wrapped-up in our daughter's questions and excitement.

My 9 year-old attended an outdoor preschool, and some days in the forest were hard. On days that were cold and rainy, he had to summon an inner-toughness and learn to plan for what gear he would need. On warm sunny days he could verbalize appreciation for the weather. No matter the weather, he came home contentedly exhausted. Today, he has an intelligence for the type of calm that comes from playing hard outside. He's figured out that when he's feeling irritated or angry, it's time to put away the screens and go outside. In a technology-driven world, I know he can always find balance when he needs it.

I wish every kid had access to this type of early childhood education. It has been absolutely critical for my kids' development. I am endlessly grateful to the teachers who made these programs available to our family. Schools that foster curious learners with emotional intelligence? Yes, please!

Sara Wittig

136 Great Lake Dr.

Annapolis, MD 21403