



Forest Hill Nature Preschool & Childcare, LLC

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207 Bynum Rd., Forest Hill MD 21050



In Support of SB 1018 with Amendments Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

I am the owner and director of Forest Hill Nature Preschool & Childcare serving 250 children ages 6 weeks to 5 years in Harford County. I currently have 46 staff members in my employ and our program works hard to meet the high-quality standards currently in place in Maryland. Our program is Accredited through the Maryland State Department of Education, and we are committed to the highest standards for our employees.

Basic licensing requirements include an expectation that lead teachers in our classrooms have a 90-hour certification which includes two college level classes in early childhood development and curriculum. Because our program has an approved academic curriculum, we are also held to a higher standard to employ lead teachers in our classrooms who have a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education or a Bachelor's degree in a related field with the two classes in early childhood development and curriculum. Finding and keeping highly qualified teachers in childcare is a challenge for administrators across the board. Teachers with Bachelors' degrees and MD State Teacher Certification can easily find jobs in the public school systems making significantly more money than we are able to offer as a private program, often with significantly more comprehensive benefits packages. Highly qualified individuals who seek employment at our school are often motivated beyond compensation by the desire to contribute to our program because they believe in the mission of our school. We have actually hired a number of parents in our program, many of whom decided to change careers to be a part of our staffing team. Often these individuals have a Bachelor's degree in another field. SB 1018 puts in place a much-needed alternate pathway for staff in childcare programs, providing for approval of a staff member as a teacher in a class with a Bachelor's degree in a related field as long as the staff member is also enrolled in the two classes needed for a 90-hour certification. These individuals have already demonstrated a commitment to higher education by completing a Bachelor degree program. They are already committed to completing the 90-hour certification courses. We are just asking that they can act as teachers in the classroom during the time that they are taking the additional coursework. This would add a full semester of eligibility to the time frame when these staff members can be considered lead teachers in the classroom.

Our program has been following the Kirwan Commission's reports closely over the past two years and while we understand the need for highly qualified staff in our programs, Kirwan's current recommendations for staffing preschool 3 and 4 year old classrooms with Bachelor's degreed teachers poses an additional hurdle for many programs in the state who will be competing with their local school systems to employ Early Childhood Education degreed teachers. Putting into place alternative pathways to assist programs with hiring highly qualified staff is an important step in supporting the businesses that are providing much needed childcare services to the families in Maryland.

Sincerely,
Lavonne C. Taylor
Director, Forest Hill Nature Preschool & Childcare, LLC