



February 8, 2022

Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot (HB0376)
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairperson Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Blue Water Baltimore is a nonprofit organization with a mission to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment and thriving communities. As part of our work, we offer educational ecoliteracy programs for all age ranges. **We write today in support of Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot (HB0376).**

Here are some reasons why this pilot program is important:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the Covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- Outdoor preschools promote the 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.

As Blue Water Baltimore's Ecoliteracy and Restoration Specialist, I have the privilege of teaching students about Baltimore's waterways and the urban water cycle. Last summer, I asked a class of students with the SummerLIT program (formerly SummerREADS) if anyone knew how the water cycle might be different in a city. One student responded by describing how Baltimore's three-pipe system works. He said he knew about the pipe system because "someone taught me this" the last time he participated in the program two years ago. I didn't care that he didn't remember me, just the fact that he retained the concept and was now sharing the information with his mostly younger classmates demonstrates how impactful ecoliteracy and environmental education can be.

We urge a favorable report on HB0376.

Sincerely,
John Marra
Ecoliteracy & Restoration Specialist