

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Laurel Scarlata and I am a nature early childhood educator in the state of Connecticut.

I am writing to ask that you vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. Here are a few of the reasons why I urge you to support the bill:

- 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.

Maryland has the opportunity along with Washington state to be leaders in the realm of Nature Based Early Childhood Education. By passing this bill, you would be insuring that children in your state would receive a high quality preschool education.

Having attended two ERAFANS (Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools) certification courses in your state, I am so impressed with the breadth of leadership the state of Maryland has in this field. Strike while the iron is hot! The momentum is contagious and by piloting the program you would be signaling to other states to do the same.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Warm regards,

Laurel Scarlata