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Ways and Means Committee

Early Childhood Subcommittee

Education Subcommittee

The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB376 Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program-Establishment

FAVORABLE

February 10, 2022

Dear Madame Chair and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to respectfully request a favorable report on HB376 – Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Program – Establishment. This bill allows MSDE Office of Childcare to waive or adapt regulations to license forest and nature preschool programs. In addition the MSDE will collect data and report findings of this initial licensing phase to determine whether to expand the program. The purpose of this pilot program is to both increase access to affordable, high quality early learning programs and to extend the benefits of nature-based learning to families who prefer that choice.

Priority for participation in the Pilot will be given to existing programs in areas where there are limited early child care options and should include urban, suburban and rural areas.

The benefits of a nature-based educational model is well documented and these programs already exist in Maryland. There are close to 60 programs listed on the Natural Start Alliance website. These nature-based programs, however, are limited in their hours of operation and in the families that they can serve because they cannot be licensed under current MSDE regulations. This emerging and promising sector of our early childhood education community are here asking to be elevated and held to similar standards as other licensed early childhood programs. I urge a favorable report on HB376 to increase access to high quality, innovative, data-supported preschool programs in Maryland.

Thank you,

Delegate Michele Guyton D42B