
February 6, 2022

The Honorable Shelly Hettleman, Lisa Belcastro, Jon Cardin, and Dana Stein

Baltimore County, MD

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegates Belcastro, Cardin, Stein and Senator Hettleman, and Ways and Means Committee Members:

My name is Alexia Savold and I am an educator and parent who resides in your district.

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.

I currently teach at The Nature Preschool at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills. I have been an early childhood educator for 5 years and my three children were also students at the Nature Preschool from 2014-2021. I am a big proponent of outdoor based early childhood education, especially now as we continue to live with the COVID pandemic. I have witnessed firsthand the benefits of outdoor education in children and adults. Children become more self-sufficient and more confident when given space outside to play and learn social-emotional skills. Watching a child climb a tree or go over a big log all by themselves is priceless. Their self-confidence grows and they are more willing to try new things more often! This self-confidence guides them when

they enter kindergarten- they are ready to try the very challenging skills of reading and writing as well as coping with the many social-emotional challenges of being in a kindergarten classroom. Providing an opportunity for more programs to be licensed will allow more children to experience the benefits of nature based education, especially families who it would otherwise not be an option either financially or logistically since the current outdoor preschools are only available for a few hours each day and can be cost prohibitive.

Please vote in favor of HB376 and let me know how you vote.

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

Sincerely,

Alexia D Savold

Alexia Savold

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