

February 1, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate Kipke and Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Kristin McCreery and I am a parent and educator 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.

As a teacher at a nature-based preschool, I have seen first-hand the benefits of a program that focuses on nature and being outside. I have seen children learn empathy and caring for the world around them simply by spending time in the woods and observing nature. I have seen children develop their gross motor skills by balancing on logs and their fine motor skills by creating ephemeral art with nature items. I have seen the wonder in a child's face when they see the first flowers of Spring and they watch the leaves change colors in the Fall. This pilot is not only wonderful, but also necessary. As a parent of two Chesapeake Bay Middle School students, I am scared by the lack of time that my children spend outdoors during the school day. We are losing our love of the outdoors and with it our compassion for the environment and the people in it. I am hopeful that this bill will be the start to more outdoor education opportunities for all students in the future.

Please vote in favor of HB376. My name is Kristin McCreery and I live at 410 Park Creek Road, Pasadena, MD.

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,
Kristin McCreery
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