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**01/31/2022**

**RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot**

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Lisa Poe and I am an educator who resides in District 27C, Calvert County.

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 am a licensed family child care provider in Prince Frederick, MD and I am also a nature-based educator. My program teaches 8 wonderful students ages 2- 5 years old. In the past few years many families have reached out to me excited about my program and the idea that my students play outside for the majority of the day. We play outdoors in all weather rain, snow or shine and my students are learning and growing strong as independent individuals who will be able to succeed in Kindergarten when they graduate. Sadly there are not enough programs like mine in the Southern Maryland (Charles County, Saint Mary's County, Calvert County) area.

Families understand that with an increase in screen time it is critical to get children back outdoors and experience a childhood many of us remember. I am an active member of our local

Calvert County Family Child Care Association and I am devastated that so many of my fellow child care providers have shut their doors, due to the additional stress COVID has put on our programs. Families in Southern Maryland are struggling to find child care for their children whether it be family childcare, child care centers, or private schools. An outdoor preschool will not only provide another incredible learning option for families, it will also give educators the opportunity to reach more families in their community and provide additional spaces for care.

Nature-based and Outdoor learning is a critical component of childhood and we need more programs to provide this type of learning in Maryland!

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,

*Lisa Poe*

Lisa Poe

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