

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Heather Bagnall

Low House Office Building, Room 160
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate Bagnall and Ways and Means Committee Members:

My name is Kristina Pexton 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 mother of a preschooler who currently attends a nature-based preschool and a kindergartner who attends a public elementary school, I can attest to a marked difference in their school experiences. My preschooler spends her days outside learning through play; something which has not been valued enough in the push for rigor and high test scores. She comes home excited to share what she has discovered and is eager to go to school each morning. Meanwhile my son resists going to school each day. He misses free play and outdoor time. He often expresses a wish for more movement at school and the opportunity to go outside. I can only imagine the positive benefits access to outdoor education opportunities would have on all children in our state.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB376.

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,

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