

Date: January 28, 2022

To: House Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

My name is Joan Clement, and I am a community member and parent who resides in Takoma Park, Maryland. 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 childcare programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of childcare 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.

Passing this bill would make Maryland the 2nd state (Washington is the first) to license Outdoor Preschools, making it a leader in the field of outdoor education.

My son attended a school in Prince George's County (Fairhaven School), which had a strong outdoor component. He and his friends thrived in this environment and are strong, resilient young adults. Outdoor schools, and nature and place-based education, support the growth and health of all of our children. This outdoor preschool licensing effort would provide an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to our children's' health, wellbeing and readiness for 21st century challenges.

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

Best wishes,

Joan Clement

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