
2/5/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Kristen Lenhart and I am an parent who resides in Prince Frederick, MD.

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.

My children had the pleasure to both attend Little Bugs Nature Pre-School with the amazing Lisa Poe as their teacher. I do not think words can describe how thankful my family is for the experiences and lessons my children learned during their time here. As a parent who works from home it was hard to have my small children get outdoor time during the day, as they needed my full attention, as well as my job did. We found Lisa's pre-school and knew this was the place for us. I was lucky enough to see it evolve to the nature pre-school it is today and I credit her pre-school and way of learning to be the reason my kids are both at the top of their classes in school each year. I am also a mom that hates mud and dirt, but we know kids LOVE it. Little Bugs was a place where it was okay to get dirty and in fact it was encouraged. So much of their upcoming years in school they are robbed of their outdoor time and I encourage anyone with young kids that they start at a nature pre-school – I would still have my kids there if I could. During the pandemic when things were uncertain, my kids got to still go and be outside and learning and not stuck inside like most. Nature preschool has taught my kids to be respectful of property, living, and nonliving things which are lessons our younger generation seem to be lacking. In fact, my children would come home and teach me more about nature than I even knew. Being at a nature pre-school provides more than I can put into words, it truly is a one-of-a-kind experience for families and really provides children a fun way to learn and using objects in nature. Little Bugs Nature Pre-school really shaped my kids to who they are today, and I fully support the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot. I think more kids and families

need to learn about other opportunities for their kids and it shouldn't be limited to an indoor facility.

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,

Kristen Lenhart

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