

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

Last summer my daughter spent 6 weeks attending an all outdoor nature camp in Baltimore City. It was a truly unique and exciting experience, not just for her but for me as well. She woke up every morning enthusiastic to return to the forest, her friends, and her teachers. Her time there spent learning, playing, and socializing perfectly preparing her to transition smoothly to preschool this past fall. The organizers of the Fox and Heron Summer Camp thought of everything! If there was a heat advisory that day, the campers would stay under the shade and cool of the woods. They partnered with a nearby licensed daycare provider to provide daily meals. Camp ended at 2:00 PM everyday to avoid both the hottest part of the day and the increased chance of lightning that occurs with afternoon summer showers. And best of all, they provided young learners with a remarkable curriculum replete with lesson blocks on caring for animals, gardening, and farming.

This type of outdoor learning experience should be abundantly available year-round in Maryland. Many parents I know are just like me and deeply desire outdoor preschool options to be widely provided and licensed appropriately. Providing organizations with a means to licensure creates accessibility and equity for low-income families to take advantage of outdoor preschools they might otherwise not be able to afford. Licensing would also give all families peace of mind when choosing an outdoor preschool because they would know that certain safety and health requirements had been met.

I can't know all of the nuances required to license a fully outdoor preschool like the one my daughter was fortunate enough to attend, but I have faith in this Ways and Means Committee to see the value-add that HB376 would allow organizations and families alike.

Sincerely,

Erin Burk