

February 2, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Sarah Zimmerman and I am a parent and educator.

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 child has been attending Notchcliff Nature Programs in Glen Arm for almost a year. It has benefitted both her individually and our family in so many ways. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, I was looking for a safe alternative to childcare and education for my then 3 year old. I stumbled upon Notchcliff Nature Programs and was inspired by the way in which unstructured nature play develops a variety of skills in a child-led approach. My child has thrived there. The outdoor environment and experiential learning it provide have allowed my child to grow academically, socially, and emotionally preparing her for Kindergarten. Every child and family deserve the high-quality preschool options that an outdoor preschool provides.

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

Sincerely,

Sarah Zimmerman

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