



**Caring For Maryland's Most
Important Natural Resource™**

Maryland State Child Care Association

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The Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) is a non-profit, statewide, professional association incorporated in 1984 to promote the growth and development of child care and learning centers in Maryland. MSCCA has over 5000 members working in the field of early childhood. We believe children are our most important natural resource and work hard to advocate for children, families and for professionalism within the early childhood community.

**Testimony: HB 376
Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program-Establishment
Support with Amendment
Submitted to: Ways and Means Committee
February 10, 2022**

On behalf of the Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA), thank you to Delegate Guyton for recognizing the importance of nature-based play, the importance of licensing and regulation for health and safety and the innovation to explore and expand the benefits of outdoor classrooms in Maryland as a collaborative pilot program over three years.

MSCCA has over 5,000 members who are adhering to close to fifty pages of rigorous COMAR regulations as the foundation of health and safety which children and families deserve and expect when choosing legal, licensed child care/early childhood education programs. MSCCA respectfully requests an amendment to Section 9.5-1103(C) that would prohibit the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) from waiving existing child care licensing requirements to meet the needs of the pilot (see amendment following the testimony). This amendment would preserve the Department's ability to modify regulations to supports the safe and authentic participation in the pilot.

Current childcare-center licensing standards are primarily designed for indoor settings. Without a license, outdoor preschools cannot offer full-day options or access state scholarships that assist low-income families with child care costs.

MSCCA fully supports the convening of an advisory group of practicing nature-based learning programs to inform and implement this pilot program as well as consider the ways to measure outcomes and success.

Our priorities agenda includes the expansion and access of affordable, quality child care/early learning programs for families and aligns with the intent of HB 376.

MSCCA believes children are our most important natural resource. The focus of this pilot is to investigate the benefits of outdoor, nature-based classrooms for children. Some of the numerous, important benefits of outdoor preschools include, improved gross motor skills, lower rates of obesity, more resilience and confidence, milder ADHD symptoms and less likely to get sick. These are outcomes that have far reaching health benefits and should be explored fully.

Maryland has lost approximately 15% of child care programs since the pandemic. Mental health issues continue to increase. We must rebuild and reimagine early childhood programs for a stronger and innovative future for children.

MSCCA urges a favorable report only with amendment.

**Amendment to House Bill 376
Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment**

Submitted on behalf of MSCCA

Amendment No. 1

On page 3, line 11: After “**DEPARTMENT**”, strike “~~**MAY WAIVE OR**~~”

On page 3, after line 13: Insert: “**(D) THE DEPARTMENT MAY NOT WAIVE EXISTING CHILD CARE LICENSING REQUIREMENTS TO ALLOW FOR THE OPERATION OF THE PILOT PROGRAM.**”