

January 30, 2022

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Rebekah Lord Gardiner and I live in Weston, Ma and am formerly of Baltimore, 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 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.

I live in Weston, MA where an outdoor education program dovetails with the Pre-school through grade 5 curriculum. Land's Sake Farm <https://landssake.org> runs the program and has been part of the Weston community since 1980. My children benefited from this wonderful curriculum and have fond memories of being able to be outside of the classroom learning about the sheep, chickens and rabbits along with the growing cycles of the many fruits and vegetables grown on the farm. Even in winter they are outside as middle schoolers preparing the maple trees for the syrup harvest. Did you know that 40 gallons of sap make 1 gallon of syrup? They learn that in kindergarten and look forward to when they can be middle schoolers helping with the harvest. Having this program in our public school has had such a positive influence on my

children and to think that Maryland could now support a pre-school outdoor program is fantastic. Backyard Basecamp located in Baltimore city is poised to be one of those programs if HB 376 is approved and having been a supporter of Backyard Basecamp for a couple of years now, I know they are positioned to be as wonderful an outdoor pre-school program as Land's Sake has been for my children. The children of Baltimore city would benefit tremendously.

Please vote YES so Maryland may join Washington state in supporting fully licensed outdoor pre-schools.

Please contact me at rllordg16@gmail.com if you have any questions about Land's Sake Farm and its partnership with the Weston, MA public schools.

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,

Rebekah Lord Gardiner

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