

Kristen Toedtman

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**January 28, 2022**

**RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot**

Dear Ways and Means Committee:

I'm Kristen Toedtman, a musician and teacher of singing who resides in your district. 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 am so grateful to have access to the outdoors, whether hiking in our beautiful state or gardening in my backyard. I constantly learn new things from my time outside and gain a deep sense of belonging and wonder that helps balance the rest of my life in this day and age. It is invaluable to have this access and I wish it for every child in our city.

Please vote in favor of HB376 - the folks at Backyard BaseCamp are so well-organized and doing good things and I want them to be able to take advantage of this new proposition.

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

Sincerely,

Kristen Toedtman