

February 7, 2022

Re: Support for HB 376 Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

I am writing in support of HB 376: Establishing the Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program in the Maryland State Department of Education.

We experienced the benefits of forest-based learning firsthand during the pandemic. While public schools moved online, forcing young children into long hours of screen time, we did the opposite: we enrolled our children (then ages 9 and 7) in a forest-based program. It offered our children a safe, outdoor educational environment, the guidance of highly skilled professionals, and opportunities to learn, grow, and play alongside the same group of fellow students each week.

The program became the highlight of our kids' week. One memorable day, my daughter dredged out clay from a creek, crafted it into objects, dried them in the sun, set up a store, and sold them to her fellow students. Geology, history, art, math, and business all in one afternoon. She and her older brother imagined how native Marylanders might have used that clay, and it sparked conversations about how indigenous peoples used the same creek and lived in the same woods that my children now explore.

Being in the forest gives our kids confidence, a sense of adventure, and a willingness to try new things. The forest provides unique opportunities for children to foster resilience; take risks; develop stamina; build physical, mental and emotional strength; and discover who they are. I will never understand *exactly* what happens in the forest. But I do know this: my children emerge dirty, exhausted, and happy in all the ways that truly count. They've spent the day engaged in the important work of childhood.

Every child should have this opportunity and passing HB 376 helps move us towards that goal. I encourage you to support it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Holly Reynolds Lee". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Holly Reynolds Lee