

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

The Honorable Chanel A. Branch

Lowe House Office Building, Room 225
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Dr. Rose Brusaferrero and I am an environmental educator and research scientist residing in your district of Baltimore City since 2019. I am writing to express my support and ask that you vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot in Maryland. The most pertinent reasons I support this legislation include:

- Its potential to widen access to these programs for children from low-income communities and those with special needs. Without State-sponsored licensing, these programs do not receive State-funded scholarships or special education service benefits which excludes families from marginalized communities from enrolling.
- Its potential to alleviate the shortage of safe childcare options in the wake of a global health pandemic. Outdoor preschool programs offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors.
- Its potential to 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.

For over a decade I've studied the research and added original data to the literature that supports the benefits of connecting children to nature. My most prominent study was conducted at Wild Haven Forest Preschool, a licensed outdoor program operating out of Carrie Murray Nature Center in Baltimore City. There is an overwhelming, evidence-based consensus in the scientific community that regular contact with nature improves the mental and physical wellness of children as well as adults. The approval of HB376 would be the first step in positioning Maryland as a champion of progressive education for early childhood.

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,

Dr. V. Rose Brusaferrero

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