

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Ilina Chaudhuri and I am a parent 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:

We need more outdoor education, especially given how many child care programs have closed during the pandemic;

- Children from low-income communities in particular are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education;
- So many kids face mental health hardships. From small to overwhelming, you know what experts always include as two main tools to support mental health? Getting natural light outdoors and exercise;
- 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;
- Maryland has, standing by right now, educators, naturalists, and administrators with the skills, experience, and wish to support outdoor education;
- This bill is a no-brainer because there is much to gain and nothing to lose;
- Outdoor education is the wave of the future and Maryland has the opportunity to be on the leading edge.

Our family felt like we won the lottery when we were accepted from a years-long waitlist for a spot in Wild Haven forest school for our 2-year old. He is thriving there in ways he would not be otherwise, and I have basis to compare as my older child went to a high quality indoor daycare. His gross motor and fine motor skills are advanced for his age, his care and helping of his classmates and teachers are evident on a daily basis, and he can identify more things in nature than I can. He knows his alphabet and numbers. My son is building a strong foundation at forest school that is going to serve him and pay dividends over the course of his life.

Setting aside the benefits to him individually, forest school has given our whole family the gift of peace of mind during the pandemic. Two years into it, our friends who are parents of young children are cracking, while we have the privilege of sending our kid, who still doesn't have a vaccine available to him, to outdoor school. We couldn't have asked for more.

Please vote in favor of HB376.

Sincerely,

Ilina Chaudhuri

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