

February 8, 2022

Ways and Means Committee

Re: Support for HB0376 - Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment

My name is Atiya Wells, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Backyard Basecamp, an urban environmental education organization based in Baltimore City. I feel in love with nature about 10 years ago when I went on my first hike, and after learning more about the natural world, I recall feeling both excitement at learning what lives around me coupled with a deep sense of grief that I did not have these experiences growing up because my family didn't have discretionary income for extra-curricular programs and activities.

Please vote to pass HB0376 to put Maryland on the path to providing equitable access to outdoor learning. Frederick Douglas once said "It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men." starting with preschools so that we can provide these opportunities to children in Baltimore, right in their own backyard.

Research has shown that time outside has led to better social, emotional, and academic outcomes for children. I urge you to pass bill HB0376 to establish an outdoor preschool licensing program, and keep Maryland ahead in the environmental education sector.

Thank you,

Atiya Wells BSN, RN