



Testimony in Support of House Bill 376

Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment

To: Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and Members of the Ways & Means Committee

From: Demaune A. Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore

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Family League of Baltimore (Family League) supports House Bill 376 as it would establish the Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program in the Maryland State Department of Education to license outdoor, nature-based early learning and childcare programs to expand access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs and to investigate the benefits of outdoor, nature-based classrooms.

As the early years of education are the time at which children are most impressionable, experiential learning during preschool can have positive long-term effects. For instance, outdoor learning can start healthy habits and lifestyles for young people. With advancements and increased reliance upon technology, children are spending less time engagement in daily outdoor activity. Youth are missing out the critical physical, mental, and social benefits these healthy pastimes can promote.

Additionally, outdoor learning can improve school performance by exposing child to hands-on experiences at a younger age. This is particularly important for families in Baltimore who experience a lack of exposure to enriched learning which can correspond to low-performance rates. Younger students in the City of Baltimore could receive help from outdoor learning as it sets a tone for successfully performing in school.

Marginalized communities are not aware of the benefits of outdoor preschool learning. The number of early childhood learning centers that have closed since the pandemic have prevented children from receiving critical opportunities to learn. An outdoor preschool offers alternative forms of childcare that to support families in Baltimore. This benefit for inner-city kids would also promote environmental literacy.

As the designated Local Management Board for the City of Baltimore, Family League works collaboratively to support data-informed, community-driven solutions to align resources to dismantle systemic barriers that limit the possibilities for children, families, and communities. Our policy focus is also guided by and in support of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention Youth and Victim Services' Results for Child Well-Being. Through our strategic planning process, we have prioritized three of these results areas, focusing on the success of Baltimore's children in school; the economic stability of families; and the safety of communities for children, youth, and families. We support HB376 in particular because of its alignment with the result areas that work to ensure "Children Are Successful in School."

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