

HB 376 Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Angela Haren

Position: FAV

February 08, 2022

Chair Atterbeary
Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building Room 131
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Via electronic submission

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Committee:

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

As a parent of a child currently enrolled in an outdoor nature program at Irvine Nature Center, I write to urge you to vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot.

My husband and I were initially drawn to the outdoor preschool program at Irvine Nature Center because as nature lovers and environmentalists we wanted our son to have as much time in nature as possible. At the time, we did not realize how beneficial it would be for our son's unique challenges. He is 3.5 years old and was diagnosed with sensory processing disorder. He receives occupational therapy weekly to help him cope with his neurodivergent challenges. However, his time outdoors at the preschool program at Irvine Nature Center has become an important part of his therapy. The benefits of spending time in nature on brain processing are well-documented and I can personally attest that the outdoor preschool program has been invaluable to his growth.

Outdoor preschool should not be only accessible for those with financial means. Further, access to quality time in nature has been segregated along racial lines in Maryland for generations. HB 376 would help to shift this imbalance by paving the way for state scholarships for all students to experience outdoor preschool.

As Baba Dioum said, "in the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught." Investing in teaching our children the value of nature at a young age will ensure the next generation of Marylanders grow up with an appreciation and love of our natural world.

HB376 is a critically important bill for a number of reasons, including:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from

the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AH', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Angela Haren
324 Murdock Road
Baltimore, MD 21212
amharen@gmail.com

OPL_HB376.pdf

Uploaded by: Atiya Wells

Position: FAV

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

HB 376 Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - E

Uploaded by: Cait Kerr

Position: FAV

Thursday, February 10, 2022

TO: Vanessa Atterbear, Chair of House Ways and Means Committee; and Committee Members
FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Caitlin Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst
POSITION: Support HB 376 – Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 376 offered by Delegate Guyton. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. We are dedicated to a future where people, of all generations, and nature thrive together.

Under current law, the Office of Child Care (OCC) cannot license outdoor preschool and childcare programs unless they have indoor classroom or building space. As such, the OCC has no path for licensing or regulating these teachers and the children they serve. This has cut off access to outdoor preschools for low-income families, as state vouchers can only be used in licensed, accredited preschool and childcare programs. Non-licensed programs can also only operate for certain amounts of time; these part-day programs often fail to meet working families' needs, which has resulted in outdoor preschool programs becoming predominantly children from middle-to-upper-income caucasian families. These programs also cannot access the services and funding needed to support children with special needs. Unlicensed teachers are not vetted for credentials that may impact children's health and safety while participating in the programs. Without licensing, Maryland State Department of Education professional development funding is not accessible to support professional training for nature-based early childhood educators. Through licensing outdoor preschool programs, HB 376 seeks to provide equitable, safe, and inclusive access to these high quality, beneficial early learning programs.

Outdoor preschools provide a fully immersive outdoor learning program using developmentally appropriate, nature-based curriculum and approaches to meet young children's educational, health, and safety needs. These programs document and assess learning, conduct parent/teacher conferences, and offer community-building events with families. Licensing will make certain that these high-quality programs can access the necessary funds, services, training, and oversight to meet families' needs as well as provide for participating children's unique health and safety needs in an outdoor learning environment.

TNC recognizes the value of accessible, nature-based educational opportunities for Maryland's youth. We commend Delegate Guyton for introducing this bill, which ensures that these opportunities are equitable, safe, and inclusive for all children and families.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 376.

HB376

Uploaded by: Demaune Millard

Position: FAV



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

Date: February 10, 2022

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."

For more information contact Keontae Kells, Executive Administrator kkells@familyleague.org

MOST_SUPPORT_HB0376.Outdoor.pdf

Uploaded by: Ellie Mitchell

Position: FAV

February 7, 2022

HB0376 — Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Established – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Ways & Means Committee;

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland's affiliate to the National Afterschool Association.

MOST Network strongly endorses the creation of an Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Program in Maryland. Beyond providing additional protection to students amid the ongoing pandemic, these outdoor learning environments present a unique opportunity to improve students' physical, social, and emotional well-being at a critical age in their psychological development.

Schools across the country have struggled to maintain covid-related health and safety measures in traditional learning environments. Social distancing is difficult in crowded classrooms and enforcing mask procedures for young children remains a difficult task for even the most diligent of teachers. **An outdoor classroom mitigates these concerns by providing more airflow and space for students and faculty.** Even without the pandemic, young children would stand to benefit substantially from the fresh air, sunlight, and exercise that these learning environments provide.

Yet the most promising aspects of outdoor preschool are its contributions to young students' social and emotional well-being. Early childhood is a time when kids are discovering the most fundamental lessons about themselves and their relationships with others. **In contrast to a traditional learning environment, outdoor learning spaces allow students to interface with the world around them in a way that promotes autonomy, creativity, and problem solving.** When allowed to do so with their peers, this experience can yield valuable lessons about collaboration and risk management.

Such experiences cannot be taken for granted in a time when virtual spaces now dominate students' time both in and out of the classroom. **The pandemic illustrated the revolutionary implications of digital education tools, yet it also reminded us of the value that hands-on, face-to-face instruction will continue to have when educating young people.** The General Assembly would be wise to support the creation of learning environments that makes use of children's natural inclination towards this kind of learning.

Ellie Mitchell

Director, Maryland Out of School Time Network

emitchell@mostnetwork.org

410-370-7498

Maryland Out of School Time Network

1500 Union Ave / Suite 2300

Baltimore MD 21211 / 410 374-7692

www.mostnetwork.org

OPL advocacy letter.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV

February 5, 2022

The Honorable Catherine Forbes and Chris West
Baltimore, MD 21212

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate Forbes and Senator West,

My name is Katie Rooney and I am the Director of Early Childhood Education at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills. I am also a resident of your districts.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot and thereby increase access to high quality child care and learning experiences that nurtures the whole child.

Over the last 13.5 years I have had the immense pleasure of working with young children, primarily 3 to 7yrs old, in either nature-based preschool programs or at a charter school in Baltimore city. For the last 4 years I have been the Director of Early Childhood Education at Irvine, directly overseeing our Nature Preschool. At Irvine, we are fortunate enough that we have two indoor classrooms and can therefore be licensed by the state. While we have these classrooms and do use them, we operate primarily outdoors, spending the majority of both the half and full day classes in the woods, meadows, and wetlands.

As a teacher, a director, and now as a parent of an outdoor preschooler, I have witnessed the incredible value and role of play and learning outdoors.

As a parent, nothing means more to me than my 4 yr old's lifelong health, happiness, and ability to thrive and grow into who she is. Without a doubt, the days she is the most in tune with her body, her soul, and with the world around her are her days at Nature Preschool. She is more inquisitive, calmer, more compassionate, and more likely to persevere in the face of challenge. All children deserve to feel that way, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status.

Taking childcare and learning outside...

- helps combat obesity and promotes physical health including improved eye sight.
- exposes children to sensory-rich experiences which offer endless opportunities for strengthening skills in all areas of development . Not just what they can see, feel, hear, and taste, but also their vestibular and proprioceptive senses. So much so that occupational therapists often create obstacle courses and interventions that often mimic the uneven terrain and opportunities to climb and hop outdoors.
- supports cognitive development, especially in regards to boosting creativity and problem-solving! Nature is constantly changing, providing an endless supply of new materials to explore and use, new play ideas, and new questions to think about. Constant change also means new problems arise naturally and children adapt and find solutions to regular meaningful problems regularly. All of this in turn leads to better executive functioning and increased confidence.
- allows children to experience first-hand STEM and environmental science concepts.
- encourages children to move and be in more developmentally appropriate ways. It's hard to be too loud outside or move around too much!

- enables children with developmental needs or learning differences to flourish! For some of these children, the open-ended nature of outdoor programs allows them to better develop skills, especially social emotional skills like interacting with peers and self-regulation.
- improves children's mental and psychological health.
- nurtures a child's sense of connection with the natural world, increasing the likelihood of future acts of stewardship

For all of these reasons and more, outdoor preschool and child care is clearly beneficial. But why do we need these types of programs to be licensed?

Expanding child care licensing to include exclusively outdoor programs also:

- increases the number of licensed child care programs, a desperate need for Maryland families. Just this past year we had a waitlist of over 30 families for our program.
- ensures that outdoor preschool programs are safe and of high quality through regulatory oversight and by instituting teaching and safety standards to mitigate risks and inform best practices unique to outdoor learning.
- Empowers nature-based early childhood educators to access quality professional development through state funds.
- Helps combat the current inequity in access to outdoor programming. The current limitation on number of hours an unlicensed program can operate combined with the ineligibility to participate in the Child Care Scholarship program, makes outdoor programs either too expensive or not feasible with their need for full time care.

When I think about what this bill is capable of doing, I think about the child who needs to move and whose voice is bombastic and pitched. Inside he would be labeled as challenging, disruptive, or worse. Outside he has space to be, he climbs freely, and that boisterous voice is a leading cry that organizes his peers in games or cooperative work.

I think of the child of the single mom, quiet and hesitant to try new things. She lives in a small apartment with no yard or green space. At Nature Preschool she gets regular access to all things alive. She builds her connection to the land and starts to see herself as part of it.

I think of the child learning English, their family recently immigrated. He is reserved and unsure how to communicate. Outside, the language of play is so universal he can jump right in and share.

I think of the child with a congenital muscular condition who has difficulty walking over curbs, up a step stool, or down a hill. Outside, her play and life activities are filled with therapy as she chases after friends in their inventive games over logs, rolls down hills, and scales mulch piles. She has ample opportunities to grow stronger and more confident each day.

I think of the child whose father suddenly and unexpectedly died. Outside he has space to grieve in both big and small ways. When it becomes too much he can run, push the hurt away as he rolls large stumps to help him climb, and splash in the mud to see he can still affect change, that he does indeed have some power and control. Seeking connection, he looks for frogs and salamanders, caring for them gently and teaching his classmates to do the same. Outside, he has space to breathe and can feel the cooling wind and rain. As the seasons and weather changes, he learns that no time of darkness lasts forever, that storms pass and the sun does eventually return.

I think of the preschool class I led on monthly nature learning and play trips at Irvine. Kids that already carried so much on their little backs: homelessness, food insecurity, trauma upon trauma. I think of how we ran out to play in trickling rain, capturing it on our tongues, filling buckets, making dams. The loudest most explosive child squealed with delight. And suddenly all the tenseness of the indoor lesson melted away. Their teacher whispered to me, "This is wonderful. They need this so much. They never get to *really play and be kids.*"

For these children and all others, I support HB376.

If you're unsure, head outside, find a tree, and breath deep. Then vote **for** HB376.

Sincerely,



Katie Rooney
Director of Early Childhood Education, Irvine Nature Center
RooneyK@ExploreNature.org
(443) 738 9223
256 Stanmore Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21212

ABeam Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

02/01/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Amy Beam. I am a nature educator and passionate advocate for helping children and their caregivers to spend time in nature. I have been teaching preschool and school-aged children since 1977 in Maryland and Washington DC. I am the recipient of the 2015 Margaret O'Neill Early Childhood Nature Educator Award and my work has been featured in the PBS documentary Mother Nature's Child, The Washington Post, Montessori Life, The National Association for the Education of Young Children's publication The Great Outdoors, the cable television show Emerald Planet, and others.

I currently serve as Vice-president on the board of directors for the Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools. I also work to train teachers and administrators in nature education. I own and operate Camp Shady Grove and Kids Love Nature! I have seen, first hand and over dozens of years, the immediate and long-term benefits that nature-connection brings to children, their families and their care providers. I've also seen how detrimental the loss of that connection has been in recent years. Mental, emotional and physical health has been declining and is amply restored when nature-connection is provided for.

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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education. This is because immersive outdoor preschools currently have no avenue to be licensed;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors in nature; and

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.

Currently, access to nature is generally limited to families who have the means to travel to a park or camp. BIPOC are particularly limited statistically to accessing enriching outdoor adventures. Overcoming obstacles to access consistently and inexpensively generates a multitude of positive results in health and well-being for participants. Licensing forest kindergartens will provide safety guidelines that will enable access to quality nature programs for young children.

I implore you to vote YES for this bill.

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,

Amy Beam

Amy.BeyondTheWalls@Gmail.com 301-963-6040

11421 Rambling Rd Gaithersburg MD 20879

AJanuary Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Amy January and I am a parent in Baltimore County, Maryland. I am reaching out to my local Maryland delegates in support of HB376 with the following letter:

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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and

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.

My child has attended an outdoor program for the past year and a half. He has learned valuable social and emotional skills and been able to interact with his peers at a time when many other kids his age have not had the same access to a safe opportunity to do these things. Additionally, there is a large body of research in support of the benefits of spending time outside. My child is fortunate enough to combine outdoor playtime with important social, emotional, and academic learning opportunities. A pilot program, leading to fully licensing outdoor preschools in our state, would give more children and families this priceless opportunity.

Please vote in favor of HB376, providing more children across our state with equitable access to valuable outdoor early childhood education.

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,

Amy January

amyfaejanuary@gmail.com

443.487.3423

5311 Kenwood Ave

Baltimore, MD 21206

AMerillat Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 1, 2022

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Amanda Merillat, and I am an Elementary Dean and a parent of 3 school aged children who reside in St. Leonard- District 27C.

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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed.

A staggering number of childcare programs in Maryland have closed during the Covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of childcare at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors.

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.

I have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, a teaching certification that includes birth through 3rd grade and a master's degree in administration and supervision. I have taught grades K, 1, 2, 3, and 4 for 18 years and I have been in administration for 2 years. Over the years I have noticed a huge increase in childhood obesity. I feel that children spend most of their time on electronics. They sit idle, indoors for hours. When we are outdoors, we are moving, exploring, and we are exposed to more language opportunities which foster early reading, speaking, and listening skills. I believe if preschoolers develop a love, appreciation, and tolerance for the outdoors at an early age they will continue that love as an elementary student and hopefully they will decide to go on a hike instead of going on Tik-Tok. When we are outside, we are receiving Vitamin D. Vitamin D is one of the best, natural, anti-inflammatories that you can consume. We all could use more Vitamin D to support our immune system and fight inflammation. Vitamin D is vital for mental health. Not having enough Vitamin D can lead to depression-like symptoms. Mental health in elementary schools is on a sharp rise, another reason why being outdoors is beneficial for our youngest learners.

Thank you for your time and consideration of H B376. I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376.

Sincerely,
Amanda Merillat
Amanda Merillat
amerillat@comcast.net
443-624-3282
345 Madeline Drive
St. Leonard, MD 20685

Antioch University New England Letter of Support.p

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

**ANTIOCH
UNIVERSITY**
NEW ENGLAND

40 Avon Street, NH 03431-3516 | 603.357.3122 | antioch.edu/new-england

To: The Maryland House of Delegates
From: Antioch University New England, Nature-based Early Childhood Program Faculty
Date: February 7, 2022
Re: Support for HB 376 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

We are members of the faculty of Antioch University New England's Nature-based Early Childhood Education Program, and we are writing to offer our support to Maryland HB 376, the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Program.

Our program at Antioch offers graduate certificates and degrees that prepare practitioners to teach young children in forest schools and other outdoor learning settings, and as such, we all are deeply committed to the value of outdoor programs to young children and families.

Research tells us that playing and learning in nature offers a range of benefits to children's mental and physical health, to their learning, and to their happiness.

This pioneering legislation has the potential to affirm the importance of access to nature, create standards of quality for outdoor programs in Maryland, and most important, to provide equitable access to the benefits of outdoor learning to all young children, regardless of a family's ability to privately pay.

We wholeheartedly support passage of this important bill for the children and families of Maryland. We applaud Maryland and hope your work will be a model for other states.

Ellen Doris, EdD

Core Faculty, Education Department, Antioch University New England

Liza Lowe, MEd

Affiliate Faculty, Education Department, Antioch University New England

Anne Stires, MEd

Affiliate Faculty, Nature-based Early Childhood Program, Antioch University New England

Nancy Striniste, MLD, CBLP

Adjunct Faculty, Nature-based Early Childhood Program, Antioch University New England

Author: Nature Play at Home: Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World (Timber Press 2019)

ASavold Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 6, 2022

The Honorable Shelly Hettleman, Lisa Belcastro, Jon Cardin, and Dana Stein

Baltimore County, MD

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegates Belcastro, Cardin, Stein and Senator Hettleman, and Ways and Means Committee Members:

My name is Alexia Savold and I am an educator and 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I currently teach at The Nature Preschool at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills. I have been an early childhood educator for 5 years and my three children were also students at the Nature Preschool from 2014-2021. I am a big proponent of outdoor based early childhood education, especially now as we continue to live with the COVID pandemic. I have witnessed firsthand the benefits of outdoor education in children and adults. Children become more self-sufficient and more confident when given space outside to play and learn social-emotional skills. Watching a child climb a tree or go over a big log all by themselves is priceless. Their self-confidence grows and they are more willing to try new things more often! This self-confidence guides them when

they enter kindergarten- they are ready to try the very challenging skills of reading and writing as well as coping with the many social-emotional challenges of being in a kindergarten classroom. Providing an opportunity for more programs to be licensed will allow more children to experience the benefits of nature based education, especially families who it would otherwise not be an option either financially or logistically since the current outdoor preschools are only available for a few hours each day and can be cost prohibitive.

Please vote in favor of HB376 and let me know how you vote.

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,

Alexia D Savold

Alexia Savold

alexiadolce@gmail.com (202) 595-4183

90 Murdock Rd; Baltimore, MD 21212

Calvert County Family Child Care Association Lette

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Calvert County Family Daycare Association

2/5/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Kristina Ganyon and I am the President for the Calvert County Family Daycare Association in Calvert County, Maryland.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

While going through college getting my degree in Early Childhood Education and Development, it was always stressed to the students how important play and outdoor play is to the development of these young children. Hands on learning is what our children need to prepare them for school. A nature-based preschool should have the same opportunity to be licensed as a home-based provider or a center, just because the style of learning is different, doesn't mean that the outcome of the children is different. We need to keep in mind that all children learning differently and having a variety of learning experiences gives parents and children options that will meet their needs.

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,
Kristina Ganyon
CCFDCA President

CMeagher Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

02/3/2022

The Honorable Susan K. McComas

District 34B Harford County, MD

Dear Delegate Susan K McComas:

My name is Christine Meagher and I am a future educator, and current PreSchool 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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and

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.

I have personally been dreaming about this coming to fruition! I am an undergraduate student at Towson University, majoring in Early Childhood/Special Education. I am also a parent to a 4 year old. So much research points to how beneficial nature-based programs are for children. How incredible would it be to be the second state in the nation to offer a full day of outdoor school, and even more so incredible to have this option because of the pandemic! Let's get our kids outside again!

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,

Christine Meagher
708 Paige Circle
Bel Air, MD 21014

CWood Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 6, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

My name is Christina Woods and I am 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

Outdoor preschools promote the skills and values that lead to a healthy world. Now more than ever our children need a safe and natural space to explore and learn. Covid has shifted every aspect of our lives and has made many people all around the world feel despair and loss of hope. Many people have had to confront death, some for the first time, and countless children have been through this heartbreak.

While in the midst of this, parents are trying to keep their own lives together while guiding their kids' young lives.

As a parent, I was confronted with this and honestly did not know what to do. I was scared and starting to lose hope.

I took this time to reflect on the resilience of nature and human's history of trying, unsuccessfully, to control it.

Then it struck me, why try to control something that is meant to be one with humans? Something that has been the classroom and curriculum of humans since the beginning of their existence?

Nature is the most appropriate classroom for our youth. I am thankful for this discovery for my family, and wish this reunion with nature for every human being possible.

To quote Jane Goodall:

“Let us use the gift of our lives to make this a better world. For the sake of our children and theirs. For the sake of those struggling in poverty. For the sake of the lonely. And for the sake of our brothers and sisters in the natural world – the animals, the plants, the trees. Rise to the challenge, inspire and help those around you, play your part. Find your reasons for hope and let them guide you onward. “

An education in and with nature is my family’s reason for hope, and I ask you to support this for all of those that hold this in their heart.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Namaste,
Christina Woods

1008 Hart Rd., Towson, MD 21286
443-564-7551
Christinajw13@gmail.com

DHoward Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

DOUGLAS HOWARD

2914 Duncan Rd. White Hall, MD 21161-8935
410-692-5682 suzukizone@yahoo.com

Feb 5, 2022

TO: Honorable Lauren C. Arian
District 7
Lowe House Office Building, Rm 324 6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members and Delegate
Arian,

I am writing to urge you to support in any way possible HB 376 (Outdoor and Preschool Licensing Pilot). Having witnessed, and supported the work of Backyard Basecamps, (Bliss Meadows) in Baltimore, I can testify that this wonderful young nurse and her staff have worked miracles transforming an abandoned acreage and house from an eyesore into a miracle. From a scar of unused and befouled property that no one wanted, Atiya Wells has built a wonderful learning site with farm animals, a garden supplying fresh produce to the neighborhood and an enriching educational experience for local children and adults. She has garnered support from citizens, businesses and been highlighted in local and national coverage on television.

This bill would allow her organization and others in the state to provide an expansive and solid program to bring nature, agriculture and a broad learning experience to scores of local preschool children. These are the types of experiences that could never be encountered in a brick and mortar classroom, especially in Baltimore.

Now I realize that you are representing a part of the state far from Northern Baltimore but your web page indicates you have children who had the privilege to experience nature and the outdoors, agriculture and parks in ways that the kids in an urban environment couldn't imagine. These kids don't have access to centers like the Steppingstone Farm Museum, The Otter Point Creek Alliance on the bay, Eden Mill Park and so many others. I believe we can programs like HB 376 to germinate, in our state, in order to bring some of that natural wealth to youngsters who would otherwise never experience life outside of concrete, asphalt and weeds.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE support this bill and cast your enthusiastic vote for HB 376 when it is presented to you.

I have included some links to highlight the Backyard Basecamp program. It would be such a treasure to have more opportunities like this for all the young kids of the state to enjoy and find positive values greet them as they grow.

Sincerely,

DOUGLAS HOWARD

<https://backyardbasecamp.org>

<https://www.wbalTV.com/article/backyard-basecamp-baltimore/36450324#>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ddd0cp1c4s4>

Dr. RBrusaferro Support Letter.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

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 Ms. Branch and Ways and Means Committee Members,

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

(443)-379-7058

2206 Pelham Ave. Baltimore MD, 21213

DRamsey Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

01/27/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Debbie Ramsey and I am a community member.
I am in support of House Bill 376 for an Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot program and ask that you vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot.

Sincerely,

Debbie Ramsey'

OSI Fellow (2016)

dbramsey@comcast.net

200 Cross Keys Rd

Baltimore, MD 21210

443-800-0566



EBurk Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

Last summer my daughter spent 6 weeks attending an all outdoor nature camp in Baltimore City. It was a truly unique and exciting experience, not just for her but for me as well. She woke up every morning enthusiastic to return to the forest, her friends, and her teachers. Her time there spent learning, playing, and socializing perfectly preparing her to transition smoothly to preschool this past fall. The organizers of the Fox and Heron Summer Camp thought of everything! If there was a heat advisory that day, the campers would stay under the shade and cool of the woods. They partnered with a nearby licensed daycare provider to provide daily meals. Camp ended at 2:00 PM everyday to avoid both the hottest part of the day and the increased chance of lightning that occurs with afternoon summer showers. And best of all, they provided young learners with a remarkable curriculum replete with lesson blocks on caring for animals, gardening, and farming.

This type of outdoor learning experience should be abundantly available year-round in Maryland. Many parents I know are just like me and deeply desire outdoor preschool options to be widely provided and licensed appropriately. Providing organizations with a means to licensure creates accessibility and equity for low-income families to take advantage of outdoor preschools they might otherwise not be able to afford. Licensing would also give all families peace of mind when choosing an outdoor preschool because they would know that certain safety and health requirements had been met.

I can't know all of the nuances required to license a fully outdoor preschool like the one my daughter was fortunate enough to attend, but I have faith in this Ways and Means Committee to see the value-add that HB376 would allow organizations and families alike.

Sincerely,

Erin Burk

ERainho Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 4, 2022

Emily Rainho
Bel Air, MD, 21014

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate McComas and Ways and Means Committee Members:

My name is Emily Rainho and I am an advocate and community member 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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and

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.

A nature based program is so beneficial to children, we must get them outside and off of screens. Some of my most memorable times from school growing up were field trips to farms, equestrian centers, and cleaning up the beach. These types of programs also allow for many different learning styles to thrive.

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,

Emily Rainho

eerainho@gmail.com

708 Paige Circle, Bel Air, MD, 21014

EReisinger Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

January 30, 2022
The Honorable Wendell R. Beitzel
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Mr. Beitzel and Ways and Means Committee Members:

My name is Emma Reisinger, and I am a small business owner in Baltimore. My family is from Garrett County; my parents and grandparents live just outside Oakland and I recently purchased the family homestead near the Savage River with my husband's family to spend more time up there. 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

One of the reasons my husband's family wanted to buy property in Garrett County is so that our six-year-old niece will have the opportunity to be immersed in the outdoors. She is learning to shoot a gun and can start a fire on her own. I am teaching her to recognize edible plants that grow in the woods. I spent a lot of time in my grandparent's woods growing up, and I think that was an extremely valuable part of my childhood, even though I have also developed more modern-day skills such as coding.

Allowing outdoor preschools to be licensed gives families from all backgrounds more choice with their childcare options. Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Sincerely,

Emma Reisinger
emmareisinger@gmail.com
667-207-1807
120 Murphy Lane, Swanton MD 21561
3200 Avon Ave, Baltimore MD 21218

EWierschke Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

1/31/22

The Honorable Nicholas Kipke

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Emily Wierschke and I am a parent.

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:

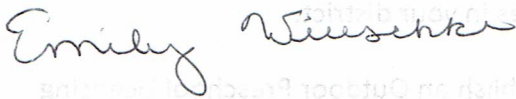
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

From a personal standpoint, my three year old son has been a student in the Magothy Cooperative Preschool Program for the past year. Prior to that, due to pandemic practices and because his father and I are both healthcare workers and directly work with patients battling SARS - COV2, our son has been cared for solely at home by my husband (his father) and myself. From a developmental standpoint, he was found to be behind other children his age in the area of expressive speech language. Magothy is the first exposure our child has had to formal education and consistent socialization with other children. Over the past five months since he started at Magothy, he has transformed into a chatty little boy who loves to come home and tell

us about his friends and adventures at school. The strides he has made in his language skills are massive. He is learning a multitude of things that could not be replicated at home. Without the outdoor aspect incorporated into Magothy's curriculum, it is unlikely we would have felt comfortable exposing our son to the preschool environment, during these unprecedented times of coronavirus.

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,



Emily Wierschke

5 Fordham Court, Millersville, MD 21108
emilyclark01@gmail.com / 202-491-7196

EWilderdmuth Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



6108 Jerrys Dr
Columbia MD, 21044

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear House Committee on Ways and Means:

My family moved to two acres in Columbia, Maryland to open a Forest Preschool after having spent a year holed up in our Baltimore City home. We were surprised to learn that we could not become licensed despite the many known benefits of a childhood spent mostly outdoors. We were able to open only by operating as a private faith-based club, outside the jurisdiction of state legislation but also without access to the resources and guidance that licensing would provide. Our program has been wildly popular, and we will hit full enrollment next month, having only been open since August 2021.

Despite our daily dog walks during the pandemic, my children first approached the two-acres of wild land in our new backyard with trepidation. They didn't want to play outside. They were reluctant to take their shoes off and let the sand in our small creek surround their toes. They tripped over branches and demanded screen time.

Months later, I can't get them to come inside. Every morning my daughter spends at least fifteen minutes crouched in the creek, quietly observing and interacting with water, sand, and water skippers. My son spends his mornings skillfully running through the forest, at five he is always in sight but loves the freedom of not being within arm's distance. They point out frog sounds and know the names of our local plants. They are physical and observant in ways that could not be cultivated when their days were spent indoors.

Outdoor preschool has made my children more confident, improved their gross motor skills, and taught them to love and appreciate our world. This hasn't been at the expense of typical preschool skills. My son learned his letters and has begun reading in Forest Preschool. They trace letters in the snow, paint letters on leaves, and read stories with their teachers and each other daily.

Math is also naturally integrated into their curriculum. They count leaves to identify plants. They count and collect their magnifying glasses, pots and pans each day – storing them for the next adventure. They learn about angles as they build kid-sized pulley systems with ropes and buckets, urging their treasures to travel from tree to tree by holding their ropes higher or lower as needed.

Outdoor preschool is especially timely in the context of COVID-19. I am worried about my vaccine-ineligible children spending their days in crowded, indoor preschools. How effective is a mask donned by a three-year-old for six to eight hours? Amplifying fears that young children cannot properly wear masks for extended periods of time are other mask-related concerns. My daughter has speech delays. I do not believe these delays are mask related as they run in my family, but I do worry that spending her preschool years unable to watch how sounds should be properly produced will exacerbate this delay. At Forest School, she is able to roam and learn unmasked while also staying safer from COVID than her masked, indoor-oriented peers.

Licensing outdoor preschool is an important step to connecting young children with the world around them while helping them to navigate shifting and variable terrains, temperatures and challenges.

I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Sincerely,

Erin Wildermuth
Director, Wild Child Association

FShepard Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members:

I am a parent who resides in your district, and I am writing to ask that you vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. I urge you to support the bill because:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to state scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

- Many childcare programs in Maryland have closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of childcare at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376.

Warm regards,

Fern Shepard

9608 Old Spring Road

Kensington, MD 20895

fern.shepard@gmail.com

HHeidarian Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

January 29, 2022

Maryland House of Delegates
Ways and Means Committee
91 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1904

Testimony in Support of House Bill 376 (Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment) - Delegate Guyton

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee:

If not for my outdoor educational experience in school, I would not be in the current field I am today.

I learned about the importance of conservation by taking a middle school class trip to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Fox Island Educational Center, which is on a small island in the Virginia waters of the Chesapeake Bay. The educational center closed in 2019 because of sea-level rise. Learning about protecting the Bay led me to learn how to farm and grow my own food and, eventually, to my current position as the Fair Farms Campaigning Manager for Waterkeepers Chesapeake where I work on promoting sustainable agriculture and conservation. We should be raising a generation of young people who are closely connected to the land and the waters that make Maryland special so they can play a leadership role in their lives in nurturing and protecting them.

If a person wanted to learn how to fix a car, they would practice fixing one in a garage— not just by reading a textbook. The same is true of environmental stewardship. If one wanted to learn about the outdoors, they would need to go outside— not sit in a classroom.

Thank you to Delegates Guyton, Feldmark, Forbes, Henson, R. Jones, Kaiser, Ruth, and Valentino-Smith, their staff, and the stakeholders involved in drafting this bill for leading this effort. If we want to protect the environment for future generations— future generations need to learn about the environment now. Every child should have the opportunity to learn outside; the earlier the better. I urge a favorable report on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Humon Heidarian
humonheidarian@gmail.com

HMoyer Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Hello Delegate Wells and Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Heather Moyer 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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed; A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and 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.

I know my daughter has loved and found great use for the times we've spent outside teaching her about nature - oftentimes without us teaching her anything, just her exploring and enjoying the outdoors is beneficial too!

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Sincerely,

Heather Moyer

3639 Clarenell Rd

Baltimore, MD 21229

443-418-4653

HQuinn Support Letter.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Hummingbird Hill Nature Preschool

February 2, 2022

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

My name is Heather Quinn and I am a licensed family child care educator who supports this bill.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I beg you to vote on this issue and please let me know that I can count on your support. My program fully encompasses the seasons as a curriculum and we spend as much time outside as we can. The children love it and crave it...asking to go outside in even the coldest of days. We need it and more of it. Please pass this bill.

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,

Heather Quinn

1030 Cockeyes Mill Road

Reisterstown, MD 21136

Hummingbird Hill Nature Preschool

Hummingbirdhill.org

HReynoldsLee Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

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,



Holly Reynolds Lee

HSchreiber-Pan Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



Center for Nature Informed Therapy

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Dr. Heidi Schreiber-Pan and I am a psychologist and clinical director of the Center for Nature Informed Therapy 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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and

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.

I have researched the effects of nature and mental health for the past 10 years and the evidence is clear. Connection to nature has a strong positive effect on brain health and emotional/social development of human beings.

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,

Heidi Schreiber-Pan, PHD

IChaudhuri Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

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

ilina.chaudhuri@gmail.com

617-935-1745

3111 Tilden Drive

Baltimore, MD 21211

JClement Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Date: January 28, 2022

To: House Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

My name is Joan Clement, and I am a community member and parent who resides in Takoma Park, Maryland. 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of childcare programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of childcare at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

Passing this bill would make Maryland the 2nd state (Washington is the first) to license Outdoor Preschools, making it a leader in the field of outdoor education.

My son attended a school in Prince George's County (Fairhaven School), which had a strong outdoor component. He and his friends thrived in this environment and are strong, resilient young adults. Outdoor schools, and nature and place-based education, support the growth and health of all of our children. This outdoor preschool licensing effort would provide an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to our children's' health, wellbeing and readiness for 21st century challenges.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Best wishes,

Joan Clement

506 Elm Ave.

Takoma Park, MD 20912

joan@chears.org

301-775-5368

JDebole Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 4, 2022
The Honorable Susan K. McComas

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate McComas and Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Jamie Debole 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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed; A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and 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.

I have personally seen incredible growth in my son's sense of independence, confidence and curiosity, and a decrease in his anxiety about new and unknown situations. He is excited about exploring the world around him and very much looks forward to his time at nature preschool.

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,
Jamie Debole
jamiew.debole@gmail.com
443-621-1853
913 Shelburne Road
Bel Air, MD 21015

JTaylor and ABreud Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Marlon Amprey, Frank M. Conaway, Jr., and Melissa Wells
Maryland General Assembly (District 40)
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegates Amprey, Conaway, Wells and Ways and Means Committee Members:

Our names are M. Jane Taylor and Autumn Breaud, and as community members and parents who reside in your district, we ask that you vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. Here are a few reasons why:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to state scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of Maryland childcare programs have closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of childcare at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- Outdoor preschools promote the skills and values that lead to environmental literacy, which supports goals of the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature, as well as the K-12 Environmental Literacy Standards required for graduation in Maryland.

The outdoor preschool program that our son Angus attends at the Irvine Nature Center in Baltimore County has been invaluable to our family during this time, and the existence of this type of early education option factors heavily into our consideration of whether we might remain in our current home or seek to relocate in the coming years.

We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



M. Jane Taylor



Autumn Breaud

mjanetaylor@gmail.com, autumnbreaud@gmail.com
2033 Druid Park Drive, Baltimore, MD 21211

JTomczewski Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 5, 2022

The Honorable Robin Grammer, Jr.

Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate Grammer and Ways and Means Committee Members:

My name is Jenna Tomczewski 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

My daughter began attending Notchcliff Forest Preschool during the spring of its pilot year in 2020. Notchcliff Forest Preschool is a 100% fully immersive outdoor program. Through this experience, my daughter has developed a passionate and loving relationship with nature. At the young age of 5, she is able to understand how important our environment is, the endless benefits nature provides, and how it is our responsibility to protect and preserve our community. My daughter has applied what she learns at Notchcliff to our community by picking up litter and speaking to neighbors about the importance of keeping our community clean. She also has developed a strong interest in planting more trees throughout the community and preserving the woods we currently have. I have personally witnessed the growth in my daughter throughout her time at Notchcliff and it is truly remarkable. She is such a smart, kind, and confident child. Attending outdoor preschool has allowed her to have the experience of a traditional preschool with many more benefits and I feel all children would benefit from this experience. By supporting outdoor learning and children cultivating a relationship with the environment, we are investing in our community and will continue to see the benefits for years to come!

I would like for you to please vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. If you could please be so kind to send a response, my address is 4003 Issacs Road Middle River, MD 21220.

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,

Jenna Tomczewski

Jenna Tomczewski

jennastafford5@gmail.com 410-371-4522

4003 Issacs Road Middle River, MD 21220

Judy Center Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



Date: February 7, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Karen Jordan and I am a Judy Center Program Coordinator. I live in Huntingtown MD and work in Prince Frederick and Lusby ,MD.

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:

- Outdoor preschool program providers cannot benefit from professional and community partnerships with Judy Centers and other organizations because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed.
- Children from low-income communities such as those I serve are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed.
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- Outdoor preschools provide an alternative for kinesthetic learners and 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.

Calvert County opened a new Judy Center in the Prince Frederick area in 2021. One of the goals of the grant was to work with child care providers to increase their awareness of and commitment to the quality rating system (Maryland Excels) set for Maryland child care providers and to collaborate with them to increase their knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices in the early childhood setting. I met a provider who has a good program

but because she could not be licensed, she could not reap any of the benefits that her peers have. I support this bill because nature based programs offer children a project-based learning environment where they acquire knowledge and skills based on real life experiences. It encourages curiosity, critical thinking and creativity, all skills our children need to be successful.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Cordle Jordan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Cordle Jordan

jordank@calvertnet.k12.md.us

443-550-8083

11655 HG Truman Rd, Lusby MD 20657

KAnderson Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 1, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Kristy Anderson and I am a parent who resides in Lusby, Maryland.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

My son attended an in-home childcare facility in Calvert County, MD that incorporated a lot of outdoor activity daily. My son struggled with some sensory issues in his pre-school age, being outside, being able to touch, smell, and hear nature in all forms allowed him to face his fears and overcome some of his sensory difficulties. Children thrive being outside with nature. So much learning occurs hands on, rather in front of an electronic device or textbook. This type of learning is just as necessary if not more as your typical workbook style pre-school. There are so many other reasons outdoor preschool's should be licensed just like your "typical" preschools.

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,

Kristy Anderson

ruxpen@hotmail.com

11256 Sitting Bull Circle

Lusby, MD 20657

KLenhart Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2/5/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Kristen Lenhart and I am an parent who resides in Prince Frederick, MD.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

My children had the pleasure to both attend Little Bugs Nature Pre-School with the amazing Lisa Poe as their teacher. I do not think words can describe how thankful my family is for the experiences and lessons my children learned during their time here. As a parent who works from home it was hard to have my small children get outdoor time during the day, as they needed my full attention, as well as my job did. We found Lisa's pre-school and knew this was the place for us. I was lucky enough to see it evolve to the nature pre-school it is today and I credit her pre-school and way of learning to be the reason my kids are both at the top of their classes in school each year. I am also a mom that hates mud and dirt, but we know kids LOVE it. Little Bugs was a place where it was okay to get dirty and in fact it was encouraged. So much of their upcoming years in school they are robbed of their outdoor time and I encourage anyone with young kids that they start at a nature pre-school – I would still have my kids there if I could. During the pandemic when things were uncertain, my kids got to still go and be outside and learning and not stuck inside like most. Nature preschool has taught my kids to be respectful of property, living, and nonliving things which are lessons our younger generation seem to be lacking. In fact, my children would come home and teach me more about nature than I even knew. Being at a nature pre-school provides more than I can put into words, it truly is a one-of-a-kind experience for families and really provides children a fun way to learn and using objects in nature. Little Bugs Nature Pre-school really shaped my kids to who they are today, and I fully support the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot. I think more kids and families

need to learn about other opportunities for their kids and it shouldn't be limited to an indoor facility.

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,

Kristen Lenhart

Kristen Lenhart

Kristen.lenhart@outlook.com

301.503.6362

1188 Gallahan Road

Prince Frederick, MD 20678

KMcCreery Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 1, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate Kipke and Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Kristin McCreery and I am a parent and educator 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

As a teacher at a nature-based preschool, I have seen first-hand the benefits of a program that focuses on nature and being outside. I have seen children learn empathy and caring for the world around them simply by spending time in the woods and observing nature. I have seen children develop their gross motor skills by balancing on logs and their fine motor skills by creating ephemeral art with nature items. I have seen the wonder in a child's face when they see the first flowers of Spring and they watch the leaves change colors in the Fall. This pilot is not only wonderful, but also necessary. As a parent of two Chesapeake Bay Middle School students, I am scared by the lack of time that my children spend outdoors during the school day. We are losing our love of the outdoors and with it our compassion for the environment and the people in it. I am hopeful that this bill will be the start to more outdoor education opportunities for all students in the future.

Please vote in favor of HB376. My name is Kristin McCreery and I live at 410 Park Creek Road, Pasadena, MD.

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,
Kristin McCreery
kshaef3910@aol.com, 443-690-8632

410 Park Creek Road, Pasadena, MD 21122

KPexton Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Heather Bagnall

Low House Office Building, Room 160
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate Bagnall and Ways and Means Committee Members:

My name is Kristina Pexton and I am a parent and educator 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

As a mother of a preschooler who currently attends a nature-based preschool and a kindergartner who attends a public elementary school, I can attest to a marked difference in their school experiences. My preschooler spends her days outside learning through play; something which has not been valued enough in the push for rigor and high test scores. She comes home excited to share what she has discovered and is eager to go to school each morning. Meanwhile my son resists going to school each day. He misses free play and outdoor time. He often expresses a wish for more movement at school and the opportunity to go outside. I can only imagine the positive benefits access to outdoor education opportunities would have on all children in our state.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB376.

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,

Kristina Pexton
ksullivank@gmail.com
252 Berrywood Drive
Severna Park, MD 21146

KToedtman Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Kristen Toedtman

706 Gorsuch Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21218
kristentoedtman@gmail.com

January 28, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee:

I'm Kristen Toedtman, a musician and teacher of singing 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I am so grateful to have access to the outdoors, whether hiking in our beautiful state or gardening in my backyard. I constantly learn new things from my time outside and gain a deep sense of belonging and wonder that helps balance the rest of my life in this day and age. It is invaluable to have this access and I wish it for every child in our city.

Please vote in favor of HB376 - the folks at Backyard BaseCamp are so well-organized and doing good things and I want them to be able to take advantage of this new proposition.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. I hope you will support this important effort!

Sincerely,

Kristen Toedtman

LBouchelle Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

1/31/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

To whom this may concern,

My name is Liz Bouchelle and I am a parent who resides in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

I am writing to ask that my representatives in my district vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. Here are a few of the reasons why I support the bill:

Learning outdoors opens children's creative and critical thinking skills by learning to be out in nature and will be able to climb, dig, and create items from their surroundings.

Being outdoors will ease and reduce infection of COVID-19 or flu viruses.

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and

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.

I have a 2 year old and a 4 month old and would really be interested in having them be part of an all outdoor preschool. We love hiking and playing outside. Even now in the snow, I make great effort to bundle them up and go outside. I support this bill and hope my representatives will support it too.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. I support this important effort and encourage all to vote in favor of HB376!

Sincerely,

Liz Bouchelle

7706 Spencer Road, Glen Burnie, Maryland 21060

LPoe Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



01/31/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Lisa Poe and I am an educator who resides in District 27C, Calvert County.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I am a licensed family child care provider in Prince Frederick, MD and I am also a nature-based educator. My program teaches 8 wonderful students ages 2- 5 years old. In the past few years many families have reached out to me excited about my program and the idea that my students play outside for the majority of the day. We play outdoors in all weather rain, snow or shine and my students are learning and growing strong as independent individuals who will be able to succeed in Kindergarten when they graduate. Sadly there are not enough programs like mine in the Southern Maryland (Charles County, Saint Mary's County, Calvert County) area.

Families understand that with an increase in screen time it is critical to get children back outdoors and experience a childhood many of us remember. I am an active member of our local

Calvert County Family Child Care Association and I am devastated that so many of my fellow child care providers have shut their doors, due to the additional stress COVID has put on our programs. Families in Southern Maryland are struggling to find child care for their children whether it be family childcare, child care centers, or private schools. An outdoor preschool will not only provide another incredible learning option for families, it will also give educators the opportunity to reach more families in their community and provide additional spaces for care.

Nature-based and Outdoor learning is a critical component of childhood and we need more programs to provide this type of learning in Maryland!

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,

Lisa Poe

Lisa Poe

422 Deane Avenue

Prince Frederick, MD 20678

littlebugsnaturepreschool@gmail.com

443-975-8510

LRivers Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 7, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Laura Rivers and I am an educator and parent who resides in Prince Frederick, Maryland.

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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and

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.

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,

Laura Rivers

Laura Rivers

laurarivers10@gmail.com, 410.610.0114

1160 Gallahan Road

Prince Frederick, MD. 20678

LScarlata Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Laurel Scarlata and I am a nature early childhood educator in the state of Connecticut.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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 the opportunity along with Washington state to be leaders in the realm of Nature Based Early Childhood Education. By passing this bill, you would be insuring that children in your state would receive a high quality preschool education.

Having attended two ERAFANS (Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools) certification courses in your state, I am so impressed with the breadth of leadership the state of Maryland has in this field. Strike while the iron is hot! The momentum is contagious and by piloting the program you would be signaling to other states to do the same.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Warm regards,

Laurel Scarlata

MCSonneman Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Date February 2, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Mary Clair Sonneman and I am a parent, educator and outdoor preschool advocate.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;**
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and**
- 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.**

Outdoor preschool programs are a relatively new idea in early childhood education, but they are incredibly popular and in-demand for good reason. Outdoor preschools also known as forest preschools are at the very forefront of a movement in education that is focusing on children being in harmony with nature and also their fellow humans. All of the traditional aspects of preschool are present in an outdoor classroom, but then there is an added layer of inquiry, exploration and discovery that happens on top of it all, leaving children with a deep understanding and appreciation of the natural world. In addition, many of the outdoor preschools have a distinct focus on social and emotional learning. In fact, I would say that the focus on kindness, use of compassion and empowering language, inclusion, validating and making space for understanding emotions, all of these aspects that are prevalent in the US model of outdoor preschools are more critical than ever.

MFrench Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

02/02/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Monica French. I was born, raised, and still reside in Baltimore city. I am the mother of two young children and a passionate early childhood educator. I have 15 years of experience working a teacher, specialized teacher-trainer, and preschool director. My current role is with Baltimore City Recreation and Parks, as the Director of the Forest Preschool at Carrie Murray Nature Center. It is a honor to serve in the city's only nature center, located in the gorgeous Gwynns Falls Leakin Park in west Baltimore. I, along with my colleagues, and all of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks support bill HB376. This very important legislation aligns with the City's mission to create a healthy and green Baltimore.

Half my career was working in traditional indoor preschool settings, the second half, was in nature-based outdoor school settings. I have witnessed the significant positive effects of outdoor preschool experiences in the children we serve everyday. When children are given the time, space and permission to learn and play outdoors, their confidence, social and communicative skills, motivation and concentration, and understanding of and connectedness to nature, strengthen. Even their immune systems are strengthened by contact with mud, soil, water and exposure to all weather!

Free unstructured, and natural play in nature is of high importance because it is a continuous process of learning. Studies show that children in Forest Preschools are well prepared for kindergarten, individual learning processes are enhanced, and gained abilities can be transferred to the classroom. Nature-based preschools foster the skills and values that lead to environmental literacy, which supports goals of the K-12 Environmental Literacy Standards required for graduation in Maryland.

The majority of outdoor preschool programs are found in upper-middle class, suburban neighborhoods or rural areas. Unfortunately, children from low-income communities and/or urban areas usually don't have those options. The Forest Preschool at Carrie Murray Nature Center is incredibly lucky to play, explore, and learn under the healthy forest canopy of Gwynns Falls Leakin Park. Yet, we are one preschool, in one Baltimore city park. Our forest preschool program currently has a waiting list of over one hundred families. These families come from all over the city, and they are a reminder of all of those who could benefit from forest preschools in their communities. With all of Baltimore's beautiful parks, that is an exorbitant amount of potential.

Outdoor preschools promote the mission and the three guiding pillars of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks — healthy recreation, conservation, and social equity.

Carrie Murray Nature Center and Carrie Murray's Forest Preschool staff and teachers strongly believe that increasing the opportunities for children to learn outdoors will benefit the City and the State of Maryland. Support children, families, and communities. Please vote yes on HB376!

Sincerely,



Monica French
Director of Forest Preschool
Carrie Murray Nature Center
410-236-7880
Baltimore, MD 21207

MMiller Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2-3-2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Michele Miller, and I am an educator and advocate 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I am a Level 1 Nature-Based Pre-School teacher, currently employed in the Baltimore County Public School system. What children need more than ever is the calming effect of nature. There has been so much stress and confusion surrounding them for the last two years, with little or no regard for their mental well-being. Being outdoors helps children relax and be themselves, while running, jumping, and playing games with their peers. The exercise they get outside helps them let go of anxiety, fear, or anger they might be experiencing.

Voting in favor of HB376 will allow parents to give their children the mental and physical benefit of outdoor learning. It is so important for many families to have the choice, and fills a great need for child care in our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. My contact information is below. I would love to hear what your thoughts are regarding this matter. I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Sincerely,

Michele T. Miller

Michele Miller

Michelegenealogy@aol.com 410 377-4169

6207 Beechwood Road

Baltimore, MD 21239-1526

MSullivan Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 6, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Megan Sullivan and I am a parent and nature preschool advocate 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

Access to outdoor preschools is important to me as a parent and as a concerned citizen who cares about the environment and climate change. My two sons both attended nature preschool and the education and experiences they received were invaluable. They made connections with the natural environment while learning important skills. They truly thrived in their schools and gained a sense of confidence in their knowledge of the natural world that can't be found in an indoor environment. Outdoor preschool is even more important in this day and age of always

being on screens. It is important for children to be unplugged and tuned in to their environment because if they don't have a connection with the outdoors, they won't be concerned enough to make the important changes needed to take care of the environment and the world around them as they grow up. Allowing more children to have access to outdoor schools, the more connections will be made with nature, the more children grow up to become involved citizens who will be motivated to be agents of change when it comes to issues of climate change and sustainability.

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,

Megan Sullivan

Megan Sullivan

megannavillus@me.com

6264 Sandchain Road

Columbia, MD 21045

National Wildlife Federation Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



National Wildlife Federation

Mid-Atlantic Regional Center

20 Ridgely Ave, Suite 203 • Annapolis, MD 21401 • 443-759-3400

Date: February 3, 2022

Bill: HB 376, Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

The National Wildlife Federation respectfully requests a favorable report for **HB 376 – Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment**, which will authorize the Maryland State Department of Education to license a select number of outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs in order to expand access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs and to investigate the benefits of outdoor, nature-based classrooms.

In Maryland, an outdoor preschool licensing program is needed because:

- Families who rely on State scholarships to help support childcare expenses are excluded from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed, creating inequities in low-income communities and those with special needs and;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the COVID-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

As one of the nation's largest conservation organizations, the National Wildlife Federation believes that in order to save wildlife and ourselves, we need to ensure that everyone has clean air and water, safe communities, easy and equitable access to the daily benefits of nature, and protection from the ravages of climate change. Educating and connecting the next generation of conservationists with the natural world is central to our work. Research has shown that nature-based, environmental education in young children results in physical, mental, social-emotional, and cognitive development benefits, including significant reductions in perceived stress. Unsurprisingly, these programs also result in an increased connectedness with nature and a desire to sustain it. Positive direct experience in the outdoors and being taken outdoors by someone close to the child—parent, grandparent, or other trusted caregiver—are the two factors

that most contribute to individuals choosing to take action to benefit the environment as adults.

By passing HB 376, Maryland will be taking a meaningful step toward expanding access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 376.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Mihills". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Mihills
Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Regional Center
National Wildlife Federation
443-759-3403 | mihillsj@nwf.org

Nature Preschool Irvine Nature Center Letter of Su

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 5, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Katie Rooney and I am the Director of Early Childhood Education at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills. I am also a resident of your districts.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot and thereby increase access to high quality child care and learning experiences that nurtures the whole child.

Over the last 13.5 years I have had the immense pleasure of working with young children, primarily 3 to 7yrs old, in either nature-based preschool programs or at a charter school in Baltimore city. For the last 4 years I have been the Director of Early Childhood Education at Irvine, directly overseeing our Nature Preschool. At Irvine, we are fortunate enough that we have two indoor classrooms and can therefore be licensed by the state. While we have these classrooms and do use them, we operate primarily outdoors, spending the majority of both the half and full day classes in the woods, meadows, and wetlands.

As a teacher, a director, and now as a parent of an outdoor preschooler, I have witnessed the incredible value and role of play and learning outdoors.

As a parent, nothing means more to me than my 4 yr old's lifelong health, happiness, and ability to thrive and grow into who she is. Without a doubt, the days she is the most in tune with her body, her soul, and with the world around her are her days at Nature Preschool. She is more inquisitive, calmer, more compassionate, and more likely to persevere in the face of challenge. All children deserve to feel that way, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status.

Taking childcare and learning outside...

- helps combat obesity and promotes physical health including improved eye sight.
- exposes children to sensory-rich experiences which offer endless opportunities for strengthening skills in all areas of development . Not just what they can see, feel, hear, and taste, but also their vestibular and proprioceptive senses. So much so that occupational therapists often create obstacle courses and interventions that often mimic the uneven terrain and opportunities to climb and hop outdoors.
- supports cognitive development, especially in regards to boosting creativity and problem-solving! Nature is constantly changing, providing an endless supply of new materials to explore and use, new play ideas, and new questions to think about. Constant change also means new problems arise naturally and children adapt and find solutions to regular meaningful problems regularly. All of this in turn leads to better executive functioning and increased confidence.
- allows children to experience first-hand STEM and environmental science concepts.
- encourages children to move and be in more developmentally appropriate ways. It's hard to be too loud outside or move around too much!

- enables children with developmental needs or learning differences to flourish! For some of these children, the open-ended nature of outdoor programs allows them to better develop skills, especially social emotional skills like interacting with peers and self-regulation.
- improves children's mental and psychological health.
- nurtures a child's sense of connection with the natural world, increasing the likelihood of future acts of stewardship

For all of these reasons and more, outdoor preschool and child care is clearly beneficial. But why do we need these types of programs to be licensed?

Expanding child care licensing to include exclusively outdoor programs also:

- increases the number of licensed child care programs, a desperate need for Maryland families. Just this past year we had a waitlist of over 30 families for our program.
- ensures that outdoor preschool programs are safe and of high quality through regulatory oversight and by instituting teaching and safety standards to mitigate risks and inform best practices unique to outdoor learning.
- Empowers nature-based early childhood educators to access quality professional development through state funds.
- Helps combat the current inequity in access to outdoor programming. The current limitation on number of hours an unlicensed program can operate combined with the ineligibility to participate in the Child Care Scholarship program, makes outdoor programs either too expensive or not feasible with their need for full time care.

When I think about what this bill is capable of doing, I think about the child who needs to move and whose voice is bombastic and pitched. Inside he would be labeled as challenging, disruptive, or worse. Outside he has space to be, he climbs freely, and that boisterous voice is a leading cry that organizes his peers in games or cooperative work.

I think of the child of the single mom, quiet and hesitant to try new things. She lives in a small apartment with no yard or green space. At Nature Preschool she gets regular access to all things alive. She builds her connection to the land and starts to see herself as part of it.

I think of the child learning English, their family recently immigrated. He is reserved and unsure how to communicate. Outside, the language of play is so universal he can jump right in and share.

I think of the child with a congenital muscular condition who has difficulty walking over curbs, up a step stool, or down a hill. Outside, her play and life activities are filled with therapy as she chases after friends in their inventive games over logs, rolls down hills, and scales mulch piles. She has ample opportunities to grow stronger and more confident each day.

I think of the child whose father suddenly and unexpectedly died. Outside he has space to grieve in both big and small ways. When it becomes too much he can run, push the hurt away as he rolls large stumps to help him climb, and splash in the mud to see he can still affect change, that he does indeed have some power and control. Seeking connection, he looks for frogs and salamanders, caring for them gently and teaching his classmates to do the same. Outside, he has space to breathe and can feel the cooling wind and rain. As the seasons and weather changes, he learns that no time of darkness lasts forever, that storms pass and the sun does eventually return.



I think of the kids that joined me regularly for a visit to learn and play once a month. Kids that already carried so much on their little backs: homelessness, food insecurity, trauma upon trauma. I think of how we ran out to play in trickling rain, capturing it on our tongues, filling buckets, making dams. The loudest most explosive child squealed with delight. And suddenly all the tenseness of the indoor lesson melted away. Their teacher whispered to me, "This is wonderful. They need this so much. They never get to *really play and be kids.*"

For these children and all others, I support HB376.

If you're unsure, head outside, find a tree, and breath deep. Then vote **for** HB376.

Sincerely,

Katie Rooney
Director of Early Childhood Education, Irvine Nature Center
RooneyK@ExploreNature.org
(443) 738 9223
256 Stanmore Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21212

Nature Sacred Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



February 7, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Alden Stoner and I am CEO of Nature Sacred, a foundation that has supported the creation of more than 30 green spaces, Sacred Places, in Baltimore alone and more across the state of Maryland. One of these spaces is at BLISS Meadows.

I am writing to express my support for outdoor preschools, and specifically, support for such a program at BLISS Meadows.

For over 25 years, we have seen first-hand the enthusiasm for outdoor education programs in Baltimore communities where an option for outdoor preschool is currently out of reach for many. For example, last summer, Atiya Wells, who leads Backyard Basecamp as well as programming at BLISS Meadows, led a summer camp at this incredible urban green space that is addressing eco-injustice head-on. More parents signed their children up for the camp than Atiya and her team were able to accommodate. Reaction from the children and feedback from families was overwhelmingly positive. This was a first for many. These young campers were able to safely explore the wonders of nature just steps from their homes.

If HB376 passes, more children will have the opportunity to spend these early, formative years immersed in the natural world. And I truly believe there's no underestimating the impact of this experience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Alden E. Stoner'.

Alden E. Stoner

astoner@naaturesacred.org

323.363.0893 cell

105 Annapolis St, Suite D

Annapolis, MD 21401

Neighbor Space Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2 February 2022

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Honorable Dana M. Stein
Lowe House Office Building, Room 251
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate Stein and Ways and Means Committee Members:

I believe you know that I am the Executive Director of NeighborSpace, a land trust improving land inside the URDL with parks, gardens and trails so as to enhance quality of life in older communities. We have a vested interest in getting kids engaged outdoors at an early age, as they are the future stewards of the land we protect, places that, as a qualified land trust, we must protect in perpetuity, which brings me to the matter at hand.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376! Please contact me at 443-377-3760 or at barbara@neighborspacebaltimorecounty.org if there is anything I can do to help you. With kind regards, I am

Sincerely yours



Barbara L. Hopkins, Esq., ASLA
Executive Director

North American Association for Environmental Educa

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



naaee

North American Association
for Environmental Education
1725 DeSales St. NW, Ste. 401
Washington, DC 20036

February 7, 2022

Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Members of the Maryland House Ways and Means Committee:

The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) is pleased to join with partners and colleagues throughout Maryland, and across the country, in expressing enthusiastic support for HB 376, which would establish a pilot program to license outdoor preschools in Maryland.

Maryland has long been a leader in providing outdoor learning opportunities to students across the state in its K-12 system, and this legislation would extend that commitment, and its benefits, to the state's youngest learners.

Research overwhelmingly confirms that nature and outdoor learning provide a wide range of benefits to children's healthy development, including:

- Promoting physical activity and physical development,
- Boosting children's mental health,
- Promoting the development of self-regulation skills,
- Improving academic performance, and
- Reducing stress.

Because of these benefits, nature-based, outdoor preschools in the United States have experienced dramatic growth across the US, growing 25-fold over the past decade according to NAAEE research. There are now nearly 700 such schools across the US, and they are available in nearly every state.

Unfortunately, the same research reveals that these benefits are not equally available to all children. Children of color, multiple language learners, and children with disabilities are all under-represented in nature-based programs today. Licensing outdoor preschools could provide greater, and more equitable, access to this innovative and effective approach to early childhood education.



naaee

North American Association
for Environmental Education
1725 DeSales St. NW, Ste. 401
Washington, DC 20036

NAAEE closely monitored and supported similar legislation in Washington State, which established a pilot program to license outdoor preschools in the state. The outcomes of that pilot were very positive, with the state expanding access to outdoor learning for young children while demonstrating that the pilot outdoor programs effectively ensured child safety and kindergarten readiness. As a result, in 2021 Washington adopted legislation to permanently authorize the state's Department of Children, Youth, and Families to license outdoor preschool programs. We believe Maryland can leverage the research and licensing standards developed in the Washington pilot to bolster and streamline an outdoor preschool pilot in Maryland.

The dramatic growth in popularity in outdoor learning for young children reflects the effectiveness of these programs. All families in Maryland should have the opportunity to choose outdoor learning for their children. We encourage you to support HB 376 to provide safe, effective, and inclusive outdoor education options to Maryland families with young children.

Sincerely,

Judy Braus
Executive Director

PMeagher Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2/3/2022

Patrick Meagher

Bel Air, MD 21014

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegate McComas and Ways and means Committee Members,

My name is Patrick Meagher and I am a community member and uncle 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

This issue is especially important to me because I have a young nephew who is at the age of preschool next year and I want him to be able to learn about nature to benefit from the mental and physical health that being outdoors can give to young children. I am afraid there is already too much screen time in their lives (and everyone else's to be quite honest!) and being outside and engaging with other students in an outdoor classroom would be extremely beneficial and give them a whole new appreciation for being outdoors. I personally remember my favorite school field trip growing up in Bel Air was to visit the Harford Glen Equestrian center. My siblings and I had so much fun during those trips and appreciating the great outdoors while respecting the earth and learning more about the outdoors in an outdoor type classroom.

I would greatly appreciate it if you voted in favor of the HB376 in order to provide families with alternative options for early childhood education.

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,

Patrick Meagher
410-322-0337 pmeagher0710@gmail.com
708 Paige Circle
Bel Air, MD 21014

RCCresiski Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 2, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members:

Hello. My name is Richard Cory Cresiski and my wife and I are parents who reside in your district.

I am writing to ask that you vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot.

I am the parent of a 4 year old and a 2 year old. I have done research and know how important outdoor education and play is for the development of a young child. We learned this even before the Covid pandemic, but the last two years created additional desire for outdoor learning with the added health circumstances.

I can also tell you that we have heavily researched the pre-schooling options available in our area, and are aware of the high demand for additional quality learning opportunities for this age group. You ought to enact any measure that can support increasing this educational capacity.

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,

Richard Cory Cresiski

rccresiski@hotmail.com

702-816-9349

3409 Keyser Rd

Pikesville, MD 21208

RGardiner Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

January 30, 2022

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Rebekah Lord Gardiner and I live in Weston, Ma and am formerly of Baltimore, Maryland.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I live in Weston, MA where an outdoor education program dovetails with the Pre-school through grade 5 curriculum. Land's Sake Farm <https://landssake.org> runs the program and has been part of the Weston community since 1980. My children benefited from this wonderful curriculum and have fond memories of being able to be outside of the classroom learning about the sheep, chickens and rabbits along with the growing cycles of the many fruits and vegetables grown on the farm. Even in winter they are outside as middle schoolers preparing the maple trees for the syrup harvest. Did you know that 40 gallons of sap make 1 gallon of syrup? They learn that in kindergarten and look forward to when they can be middle schoolers helping with the harvest. Having this program in our public school has had such a positive influence on my

children and to think that Maryland could now support a pre-school outdoor program is fantastic. Backyard Basecamp located in Baltimore city is poised to be one of those programs if HB 376 is approved and having been a supporter of Backyard Basecamp for a couple of years now, I know they are positioned to be as wonderful an outdoor pre-school program as Land's Sake has been for my children. The children of Baltimore city would benefit tremendously.

Please vote YES so Maryland may join Washington state in supporting fully licensed outdoor pre-schools.

Please contact me at rllordg16@gmail.com if you have any questions about Land's Sake Farm and its partnership with the Weston, MA public schools.

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,

Rebekah Lord Gardiner

rllordg16@gmail.com

16 Warren Place

Weston, MA 02493

RJones Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Rachel Martin Jones and I am a parent with a background in education who resides in district 5. 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:

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed; I have witnessed this firsthand when I was a Special Ed paraeducator at Green Holly Elementary School. Many children with special needs require more intensive supervision, and sometimes equipment, to enjoy the outdoors and often their families can't provide these services outside of school. Providing children as many opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, especially at an early age, can help with physical and mental growth and provide an important place to play and learn;

A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; I also have a firsthand experience with my oldest child's part time preschool closing during the pandemic and no similar options for my second child who will be at preschool age this Fall. There are no longer many options for younger children to have a part time preschool with outdoor learning and play in our area;

Finally, 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.

I have witnessed firsthand how much the wonder of nature can promote an interest in sciences, environmental learning and community appreciation. From working at an Elementary School, to volunteering at the Elms Environmental Learning Summer camp, to my own children, I've seen how learning in the outdoors strengthens children's interest. They love learning about local plants and animals, and can really see for themselves how things work- not by having to imagine them, but by being able to experience them themselves.

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,

Rachel Martin Jones

46020 E Sunrise Dr, Lexington Park, MD 20653

rachelm425@gmail.com

SLong Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 01, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Solange Long and I am a parent who resides in Prince Frederick, MD.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

(Include a personal story. Tell your representative why the issue is important to you and how it affects you, your family members and your community.)

Nature based education has been important to our family. Our 4 year old daughter has attended a nature based preschool for the past two years and has excelled. Not only has she learned so much about the world around her, but she has gained more confidence and emotional growth. By experiencing outdoor play, she has gained physical and mental strength, and learned to trust her own decisions. The hands-on learning has really allowed her to see the full picture of what she is learning and how it relates to the world around her.

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,

Solange Long
scharb12@gmail.com, (443) 975-1435
425 Heron Landing Way Prince Frederick MD, 20678

South Mountain Nature School Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Date February 2, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

To whom it may concern,

My name is Mary Clair Sonneman and I am a parent, educator and outdoor preschool advocate.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

Outdoor preschool program are a relatively new idea in early childhood education, but they are incredibly popular and in-demand for good reason. Outdoor preschools also known as forest preschools are at the very forefront of a movement in education that is focusing on children being in harmony with nature and also their fellow humans. All of the traditional aspects of preschool are present in an outdoor classroom, but then there is an added layer of inquiry, exploration and discovery that happens on top of it all, leaving children with a deep understanding and appreciation of the natural world. In addition, many of the outdoor preschools have a distinct focus on social and emotional learning. In fact, I would say that the focus on kindness, use of compassion and empowering language, inclusion, validating and making space for understanding emotions, all of these aspects that are prevalent in the US model of outdoor preschools are more critical than ever.

SPenix Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 2, 2022

The Honorable Delores G. Kelly
3 East Miller State Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Senator Kelly and Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Susan Penix, and I am a community member 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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of childcare programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of childcare at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

I believe that it is important for children to have access to quality outdoor nature-based learning opportunities, my own granddaughter attended a program when she was three. However, currently there is no oversight or licensing for these programs, and I personally feel that having a set of licensing standards to help ensure quality and safety is imperative for these programs. The bill is an opportunity to put a pilot program in place and to develop the licensing standards which are so desperately needed for outdoor nature-based programs. I am asking

that you vote in favor of HB376 and look forward to hearing back from you showing your support. My email address is sgpenix885@gmail.com.

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,

Susan Penix

Susan Penix
sgpenix@gmail.com
12336 Bonmot Place
Reisterstown, MD 21136

SZimmerman Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 2, 2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Sarah Zimmerman and I am a parent and educator.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

My child has been attending Notchcliff Nature Programs in Glen Arm for almost a year. It has benefitted both her individually and our family in so many ways. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, I was looking for a safe alternative to childcare and education for my then 3 year old. I stumbled upon Notchcliff Nature Programs and was inspired by the way in which unstructured nature play develops a variety of skills in a child-led approach. My child has thrived there. The outdoor environment and experiential learning it provide have allowed my child to grow academically, socially, and emotionally preparing her for Kindergarten. Every child and family deserve the high-quality preschool options that an outdoor preschool provides.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. I hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB376!

Sincerely,

Sarah Zimmerman

Sarah Zimmerman
sarahzimmerman29@gmail.com
717.756.2738
4 Beaver Pond Circle
Parkville, MD 21234

The Parents' Place of MD Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



February 7, 2022

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbury, Alonzo Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee
Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Delegates Atterbury and Washington:

My name is Rene Averitt-Sanzone and on behalf of The Parents' Place of MD (www.ppmmd.org), a statewide parent training and health information center that serves families who have children with disabilities and special healthcare needs and I am writing in support of HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot. The families we serve and support are from all districts across the state.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with disabilities and special healthcare needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

Our families with preschool children want their children to have opportunities to play, learn, and make friends with children without disabilities. When programs like this are options for families then ALL children benefit, grow, and learn.

The Parents' Place of MD would like to ask the committee for a favorable vote for HB 376.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376. We hope that you will support this important effort and vote yes to HB376!

Sincerely,

Rene Averitt-Sanzone

Rene Averitt-Sanzone
Executive Director

Thealey Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Toni Healey
9311 Bay Ave
North Beach, Maryland 20714
Calvert County

Honorary Mark Fisher
Lowe House Office Building Room 202
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

HB376

Dear Delegate Fisher and Ways and Means Committee Members,

Greetings. As a retired director of a large childcare center in Calvert County and a former MSDE grant appointed Early Childhood Liaison for Calvert County Public schools, I have learned that all children, including those with developmental delays and special needs learn best when they have an opportunity to be outside. Outdoor play, especially in the early preschool years, provides children with the opportunity to learn naturally with the freedom to run, jump and engage in co-operative play. Play is often talked about as if it is a relief from serious learning. However, with guided direction, children can engage in natural learning experiences that include math, science and the language arts with more ease while developing fundamental skills required for graduation from high school. Play is the serious business of learning, not a relief from learning.

In outdoor settings, there are fewer behavioral issues as children are not kept in a rigid learning environment. Each child can learn at his own pace. Although retired, I am an active community member currently overseeing a community based outdoor program. I have the joy of seeing the benefits that all children experience during outdoor play and learning.

Every child in Maryland has the need and desire to be outside. Required use of electronics during the school pandemic lockdowns has made outdoor play for children more crucial than ever. Many children are not given the opportunity to play outside due to provider obligations, parental concerns, unsafe conditions and time constraints for single and working parents. Since outdoor programs are not licensed by MSDE as full day programs, they are not eligible to receive state funded childcare scholarships. Therefore, children in low economic situations and children with developmental delays are at an even larger disadvantage.

As a resident of Calvert County and an advocate of outdoor play experiences, I am witness to the difference made when children can be outside. Studies have shown that children who experience time outside are more resilient, have fewer behavioral issues, develop a better sense of self and suffer fewer illnesses (Barefoot and Balanced). Children love to run through meadows, smell the outdoors in the changing seasons, listen to the birds and the different sounds in a natural setting.

I have met many wonderful providers of outdoor programs that desire to be involved in this pilot program. Due to the closure of many childcare centers during the recent pandemic, outdoor programs can offer an alternative to families seeking care. HB376 will allow many of the current outdoor programs to grow and become fully licensed by expanding their hours to full day care. Current licensing only

allows outdoor programs with shorter hours. This hinders working parents from using these programs. Passing HB376 will allow current programs the ability to become licensed under the MSDE Office of Childcare. I strongly encourage you to pass HB376, as the future of our children depends on it.

Sincerely,

Toni Healey
Outdoor Play Advocate

TSims Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

01/27/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Tiffany Sims and I am a resident and parent residing in Baltimore City and I am writing to ask that you vote in favor of HB376 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. Here are a few reasons why I urge you to support this bill:

- Due to many reasons that I am sure you are aware Baltimore City loses many residents to the neighboring counties when families have children because opportunities for quality education for children within the city limits are scarce. This offers an amazing opportunity to entice families to stay, build, and grow within our neighborhood.
- Unfortunately many children in our city do not have outside outlets and opportunities to learn about the environment and all of the things it offers. They miss out on fresh fruits and vegetables and animals that do not typically live within the city limits.
- Because of COVID-19 any outdoor opportunity that we can give our children is better for their emotional and physical safety.

I moved to Maryland from Virginia where I grew up being able to walk out my backdoor and enjoy ample green space. We had a large yard and were able to have many animals and grow our own fruits and vegetables. Most children in Baltimore city do not have this opportunity. A lot of the amazing green spaces that we have in the city go unknown to our neighbors and this is a wonderful way to change that and also promote opportunities for our children to learn. I would love for us to give our kids more opportunities to learn, be inquisitive, and be hands on in ways that allows them to become great thinkers and leaders in the future. We have many issues with our environment and we have to raise our children to care about them and be able to think about solutions.

Please vote in favor of this proposition.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB376.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Sims

4415 Lasalle Avenue

Baltimore, Maryland 21206

TTodd Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Tamara Todd and I am a parent and resident of District 10.

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:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

During 2020, because of COVID, our family decided to send our 4 year old to an outdoor preschool. We were very happy with this decision, as our 4 year old developed confidence, social skills, and learned to appreciate the natural world. He could expend energy and gain a sense of calm from his interaction with the outdoors. We are now sending his younger brother, now 3 yrs old, to the same preschool. This choice would not be viable to us without the financial assistance of family members. The passage of HB376 would allow this option to be more widely available and feasible for more families. Please let me know your stance on HB376; I do urge you to vote in favor of the bill.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration!

Tamara Todd

221 Northway Rd, Reisterstown MD 21136

tamaratodd15@gmail.com

Washington Nature Preschool Association Letter of

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



February 2, 2022

Honorable Members of the Maryland House of Delegates,

I represent the Washington Nature Preschool Association ([WaNPA](#)) and I am writing in support of House Bill 376. We support this Bill, and encourage you to do the same, because of the incredible success we have experienced as the result of our own licensing pilot in Washington state, as well as the continued positive impacts we're seeing now that licensing of outdoor nature-based childcare is permanent here. We deeply admire the state of Maryland's strong commitment to stewardship in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. You were first in the nation to pass K-12 Environmental Literacy graduation requirements and you are clearly committed to growing future generations of citizens who will cherish and protect the natural world. HB 376 is a logical extension of that commitment; it has the potential to positively impact thousands of children and families, and offers a pathway to providing equitable access to safe, high-quality outdoor learning, which has never been more important.

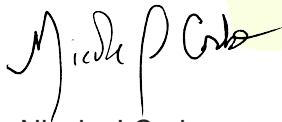
In 2017, the WA state legislature established the outdoor preschool licensing pilot with overwhelming bi-partisan support. Over the following four years, many of us at WaNPA worked with the Washington state Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) to develop safety and quality standards for outdoor classrooms. Our pilot program was guided by the ever-growing research that speaks to the benefits of outdoor nature-based learning: it supports social and emotional growth, positive academic outcomes, and provides a multitude of physical and mental health benefits, all while enabling children to form a meaningful bond with the natural environment. We currently have 6 fully licensed outdoor preschool programs, with 4 more in process, and DCYF is regularly providing completely booked orientations to interested providers. One of the most exciting results of licensing outdoor nature-based learning in WA is how many new programs are seeking licensure. You see, licensing supports offering full-day programming and services for children with special needs (and their families) who lack equitable access to outdoor preschools, and these new programs are seeking DCYF's oversight and partnership so that they can better meet the needs of all families.

Equitable access to high quality early learning programs and the outdoors is central to the need for licensing. As you no doubt know, there is a disparity in the socio-economic and racial makeup of those who frequently occupy natural spaces. Sadly, children are the ones most often denied access to the benefits of spending time outdoors. Either families don't have safe natural spaces nearby or, if they do, those natural spaces do not feel welcoming. Meanwhile, many working families simply cannot find the time to spend outdoors. As a result, we do not see the diversity of our communities fully represented in our natural spaces, nor in our nature

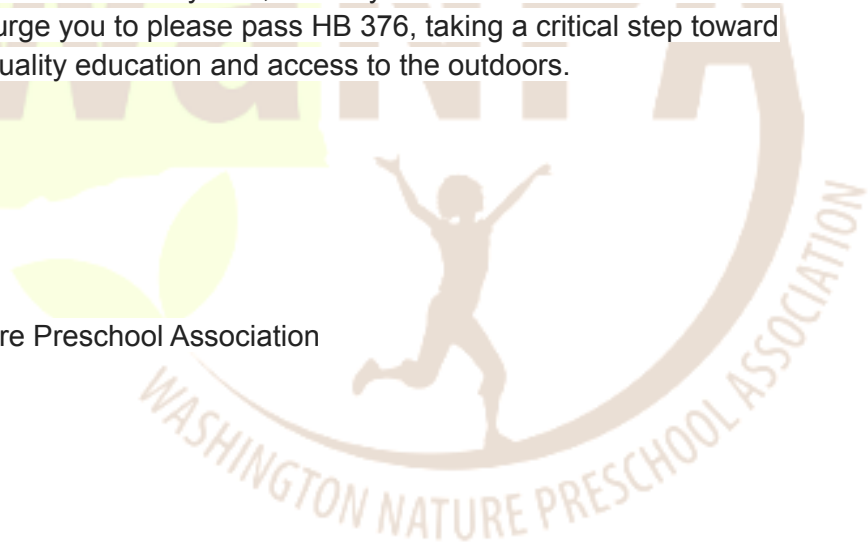
preschools. Children from low-resourced communities are not able to reap the benefits of outdoor preschool if their parents cannot access subsidies and state funding to attend. Take, for example, the *Saplings & Cedars* program at the Squaxin Island Child Development Center here in WA, where they have 12 ECEAP families and 15 families utilizing Working Connections or other state, federal, or tribal subsidies. That's 27 out of 32 families that are provided care through subsidies. Squaxin Island provides an example of the clear demand for access to state subsidized outdoor learning - demand that is also present in Maryland. How exciting that you have an opportunity to expand access to high-quality early learning in safe, welcoming natural spaces through an outdoor preschool licensing pilot program.

Across the nation, the number of nature-based programs has risen significantly over the past decade ([a 25 fold increase, which more than doubled from 2017 to 2020](#)), and there has been another increase since the beginning of the pandemic, with many indoor programs moving to learning outdoors as well. There is much uncertainty in this time, and the health impacts of COVID-19, which disproportionately affect Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islanders, and other people of color, continue to be staggering. However, through a licensing pilot, you can bring opportunities to children, their families, and the schools that serve them, with the potential to not only improve their health and safety now, but truly alter the course of their lives for the better. We in Washington urge you to please pass HB 376, taking a critical step toward equitable access to high-quality education and access to the outdoors.

Sincerely,



Nicole J Corbo
Director, Washington Nature Preschool Association
wanaturepa@gmail.com



HB 376 - Favorable - Guyton.pdf

Uploaded by: Michele Guyton

Position: FAV

MICHELE GUYTON
Legislative District 42B
Baltimore County

Ways and Means Committee
Early Childhood Subcommittee
Education Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 306
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3793 • 301-858-3793
800-492-7122 Ext. 3793
Michele.Guyton@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB376 Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program-Establishment

FAVORABLE

February 10, 2022

Dear Madame Chair and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to respectfully request a favorable report on HB376 – Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Program – Establishment. This bill allows MSDE Office of Childcare to waive or adapt regulations to license forest and nature preschool programs. In addition the MSDE will collect data and report findings of this initial licensing phase to determine whether to expand the program. The purpose of this pilot program is to both increase access to affordable, high quality early learning programs and to extend the benefits of nature-based learning to families who prefer that choice.

Priority for participation in the Pilot will be given to existing programs in areas where there are limited early child care options and should include urban, suburban and rural areas.

The benefits of a nature-based educational model is well documented and these programs already exist in Maryland. There are close to 60 programs listed on the Natural Start Alliance website. These nature-based programs, however, are limited in their hours of operation and in the families that they can serve because they cannot be licensed under current MSDE regulations. This emerging and promising sector of our early childhood education community are here asking to be elevated and held to similar standards as other licensed early childhood programs. I urge a favorable report on HB376 to increase access to high quality, innovative, data-supported preschool programs in Maryland.

Thank you,

Delegate Michele Guyton D42B

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Delegate Michele Guyton".

French - Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Monica French

Position: FAV

02/02/2022

RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

To whom it may concern,

My name is Monica French. I was born, raised, and still reside in Baltimore city. I am the mother of two young children and a passionate early childhood educator. I have 15 years of experience working a teacher, specialized teacher-trainer, and preschool director. My current role is with Baltimore City Recreation and Parks, as the Director of the Forest Preschool at Carrie Murray Nature Center. It is a honor to serve in the city's only nature center, located in the gorgeous Gwynns Falls Leakin Park in west Baltimore. I, along with my colleagues, and all of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks, support bill HB376. This very important legislation aligns with the City's mission to create a healthy and green Baltimore.

Half my career was working in traditional indoor preschool settings, the second half, was in nature-based outdoor school settings. I have witnessed the significant positive effects of outdoor preschool experiences in the children we serve everyday. When children are given the time, space and permission to learn and play outdoors, their confidence, social and communicative skills, motivation and concentration, and understanding of and connectedness to nature, strengthen. Even their immune systems are strengthened by contact with mud, soil, water and exposure to all weather!

Free unstructured, and natural play in nature is of high importance because it is a continuous process of learning. A study by the North American Association for Environmental Education shows that children in Forest Preschools are well prepared for kindergarten, individual learning processes are enhanced, and gained abilities can be transferred to the classroom. Nature-based preschools foster the skills and values that lead to environmental literacy, which supports goals of the K-12 Environmental Literacy Standards required for graduation in Maryland.

The majority of outdoor preschool programs are found in upper-middle class, suburban neighborhoods or rural areas. Unfortunately, children from low-income communities and/or urban areas usually don't have those options. The Forest Preschool at Carrie Murray Nature Center is incredibly lucky to play, explore, and learn under the healthy forest canopy of Gwynns Falls Leakin Park. Yet, we are one preschool, in one Baltimore city park. Our forest preschool program currently has a waiting list of over one hundred families. These families come from all over the city, and they are a reminder of all of those who could benefit from forest preschools in their communities. With all of Baltimore's beautiful parks, that is an exorbitant amount of potential.

Outdoor preschools promote the mission and the three guiding pillars of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks — healthy recreation, conservation, and social equity.

Carrie Murray Nature Center and Carrie Murray's Forest Preschool staff and teachers strongly believe that increasing the opportunities for children to learn outdoors will benefit the City and the State of Maryland. Support children, families, and communities. Please vote yes on HB376!

Sincerely,



Monica French
Director of Forest Preschool
Carrie Murray Nature Center
410-236-7880
Baltimore, MD 21207

HB376

Uploaded by: Monica Wiedel-Lubinski

Position: FAV

Testimony for HB 376

Prepared by: Monica Wiedel-Lubinski, M.Ed.

Feb 8, 2022

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to share why outdoor preschool licensing is needed in our state. It is my great privilege to speak to you about House Bill 376 to establish an outdoor preschool licensing pilot here in Maryland.

My name is Monica Wiedel-Lubinski. I am the founding executive director of the Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools. I am also the founder/co-founder of three nature-based programs in Maryland including the nature preschool at Irvine Nature Center which was Maryland's second licensed, NAEYC-accredited nature preschool. I have written about nature-based education for various journals and books, and I frequently teach others on the topic as a keynote speaker, lecturer, and even on international podcasts. I am currently writing a book about nature-based early childhood education for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). My formal education was at Towson University where I earned a Master's Degree in early childhood education while working and raising two young children. I am also an Adjunct professor at Goucher College in their Environmental Studies certificate program.

I've been a member of Project Green Classrooms with their Nature Play Space working group for several years and was the co-chair of the Council for Nature and Forest Preschools with the Natural Start Alliance, a project of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). I'm very pleased to say that they provided a letter of support in favor of this bill, alongside our colleagues at the National Wildlife Federation and local Sierra Club.

I am one of 10 authors who contributed to the *Nature-Based Preschool Professional Practices Guidebook* published by NAAEE in 2019 to professionalize standards in our growing field. I share my background to help provide context for the much larger considerations there are for outdoor preschools, which many of my contemporaries may not be aware of. The concept of outdoor preschool is not new. What we need is a path to make it licensed here in Maryland so that more children and families can reap its benefits. As it stands, only the privileged can afford to attend outdoor preschool.

Outdoor preschools are different from other early learning programs that can be licensed. Licensed programs have a building or facility with an indoor classroom. They may spend portions of their day outside, but they have an indoor location that qualifies for licensing purposes. There are many wonderful licensed nature preschools and childcare centers in Maryland! The distinction here is that there are also **immersive outdoor preschools** that spend 100% of their time engaged in outdoor learning. Outside! They do not have indoor classrooms - nor do they want or need them. Outdoor preschools have emergency shelter spaces, but the focus of their learning is with, in, and about nature.

Because outdoor preschools lack an indoor facility, there is a fundamental issue with being able to count the square footage or get a 'use and occupancy permit' for example as part of the licensing process. For an outdoor preschool, it makes no sense to pay overhead for an indoor facility that simply will not be used.

To be clear, outdoor preschools are not camp. They run year round, the way any other early learning programs do. They utilize curriculum, early learning standards, build community with families, assess student learning, implement health and safety protocols, document learning through evidence-based practices, and provide a deeply meaningful experience about what it means to learn and grow in the place you call home.

Outdoor preschools offer a very specific, place-based philosophy centered on nature pedagogy and environmental literacy. Not every family may want an immersive outdoor preschool for their child. But a growing number of families recognize that they want their children to be active, healthy, and engaged in sensory-rich, experiential, hands-on learning. Physical development is on full display in outdoor preschool programs. Social and emotional learning is also deep and rich in immersive outdoor preschools. Children work together in community as they have adventures in all kinds of weather. Outdoor learning provides stress relief and mental health benefits, especially for children who experience trauma. Empathy and respect for living things are common threads across these programs - and that empathy is crucial for the much larger goals that we have here in Maryland for environmental literacy and the protection of our natural resources.

I should note that Maryland was the first in the nation to pass a graduation requirement for K through 12 environmental literacy standards. Even at the age of three, the children are keenly aware of their place and their impact in the natural world. These pro-environmental attitudes usher in the next generation of compassionate people who want to protect and conserve our incredible natural resources in Maryland.

Outdoor preschools provide soil for the seeds of all kinds of cognitive and intellectual development to blossom. Beyond the obvious science concepts, we address other development domains including language and literacy, math and creative arts, technology and engineering - even history that comes to life while reading the landscape and discovering the ways in which the land has been used for centuries if not millenia. Learning is active and alive outside. There is no sacrifice of foundation skills. In fact, according to a peer-reviewed 2019 study, researchers did a critical review of recent literature and found, **"In academic contexts, nature-based instruction outperforms traditional instruction."** (Kuo et al, 2019). See the journal *Frontiers in Psychology* for more information:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305/full>

Given Maryland's leadership in environmental literacy including the Partnership for Children in Nature and Project Green Classrooms, and the abundant research about the value of nature-based, outdoor learning, it makes sense for us to extend the opportunity to younger children.

The most compelling reason we need to conduct a pilot program for outdoor preschool licensing is because of the barriers that exist for families who want to attend outdoor preschools but cannot.

Children that come from low-resourced backgrounds and rely on child care scholarships can only use them in licensed programs. This means that outdoor preschools cannot accept children who need to use child care scholarships to attend. As you might imagine, this disproportionately places a burden on low-income families and many of those families are in black and brown communities. This is not acceptable and it is not equitable. Further, outdoor preschool programs are then forced to choose between budgeting for scholarships and paying teachers less, or paying teachers a more fair and livable wage but with no additional funds for scholarships support to families in need. What a horrible position for any program to be put in! When outdoor preschools are able to be licensed, we will be able to accept child care subsidies so that we will never have to turn away any families who want this enriching opportunity for their children.

Currently, outdoor preschools can only operate for short periods of time before being required to be licensed. But as stated, there is no path to do so. This means that short, part-day outdoor preschools can only be accessed by families with the luxury of attending a 2- or 3-hour program once or twice per week. This denies equitable access for working families who need longer hours of care.

Safety is also a concern. Teachers in licensed programs are vetted to be sure they understand child development, health and safety considerations, developmentally appropriate practices, etc. Right now, anyone could offer an unlicensed program that could pose potential harm to children because the state does not allow for licensing. Additionally, licensed programs can access professional development funding to ensure teachers have, and can maintain, their credentials with financial help from the state.

Children with special needs (and their families) lack equitable access to outdoor preschools and experience disproportionate barriers to getting special services if they wish to attend. Far more supportive infrastructure is in place for children in licensed child care settings. There are a range of developmental benefits for children with special needs and diverse abilities, and the pilot program can further address how to include all children in outdoor preschools.

It is also baffling that another state department, the Maryland Dept. of Mental Health and Hygiene, licenses 100% outdoor programs in the summer - without indoor facilities - yet the Maryland State Dept. of Education's Office of Child Care does not acknowledge the same for year-round outdoor preschool. If health and safety standards are acceptable for hand washing and toileting, even amidst COVID protocol, and camps can obtain state licensure working with the same age of children - why are there additional barriers in place for outdoor preschools through the Office of Child Care? The pilot program through this bill would address these challenges and ensure a path licensure.

We also want to acknowledge the staggering number of childcare programs that have closed since the start of the pandemic (nearly 1,000). Outdoor preschools can provide another high-quality option and build capacity for high quality early learning opportunities. For existing child care programs, they would be able to take families off their waitlists with an expanded outdoor preschool option.

Fortunately, Washington state is the first in the nation to make a path for outdoor nature-based preschools to be licensed. Our Outdoor Preschool Licensing Advisory Team has been in close contact to learn more about their progress. Following a comprehensive 4-year pilot program, their final report concludes that children demonstrated 'kindergarten readiness' that exceeded the state's average for other licensed care programs and found gains that overwhelmingly support the value of outdoor preschools.

Outdoor Preschools demonstrate an ability to meet rising demand for high quality care, increase capacity to provide enriching early learning opportunities, and address issues of equitable, affordable access to outdoor learning for all children. WA's pilot provided an opportunity for experienced nature-based ECE providers to work alongside state department officials to collaborate on specific protocol that supports evidence-based standards and dually addresses the unique needs of outdoor preschools. We hope that Maryland will be the second state in the US to embark on an outdoor preschool licensing pilot program and ultimately forge a path for licensing.

I understand some of my colleagues in traditional early childhood education may not yet understand how and why outdoor learning is vital to early childhood education. At this stage, the benefits of nature-based early childhood education and outdoor preschool are well established and not up for debate. What we need to do is ensure that ALL families have equitable access to these programs. We have a trail map in WA and leaders and stakeholders here in Maryland guiding these efforts. House Bill 376 will provide the opportunity for us to work with the Office of Childcare to adapt existing regulations so there is a path for licensing. I urge you to vote in favor of HB376 to create a pilot program that will help provide more equitable access to outdoor preschool.

With Gratitude,

Monica Wiedel-Lubinski

HB0376-WM-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Natasha Mehu

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
Mayor

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB 376

February 10, 2022

TO: Members of the House Ways and Means Committee
FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director, Office of Government Relations
RE: HB 376: Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill 376.

This very important legislation aligns with the City's mission to create a healthy and green Baltimore.

We witness the significant positive effects of outdoor preschool experiences in the children we serve every day. When children are given the time, space, and permission to learn and play outdoors, their confidence, social and communicative skills, motivation and concentration, and understanding of and connectedness to nature, strengthen. Even their immune systems are strengthened by contact with mud, soil, water, and exposure to all weather!

Free unstructured, and natural play in nature is of high importance because it is a continuous process of learning. Studies show that children in Forest Preschools are well prepared for kindergarten, have enhanced individual learning processes, and gain abilities that can be transferred to the classroom. Nature-based preschools foster the skills and values that lead to environmental literacy, which supports the goals of the K-12 Environmental Literacy Standards required for graduation in Maryland.

We are incredibly lucky to play, explore, and breathe under the healthy forest canopy of Gwynns Falls Leakin Park. We have watched residents who visited the park over the last two years become increasingly aware of the benefits of the outdoors, perhaps one of the silver linings of the otherwise devastating pandemic. They are often inspired by our student's harmonious exploration and curiosity for the natural world. Unfortunately, children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not always have equitable access to parks, much less the benefits of nature-based early childcare because immersive outdoor preschools currently

*Annapolis – phone: 410.269.0207 • fax: 410.269.6785
Baltimore – phone: 410.396.7208 • fax: 410.396.5136
www.baltimorecity.gov*

cannot be licensed. Our forest preschool program currently has a waiting list of over one hundred families. These families come from all over the city, and they are a reminder of all of those who could benefit from forest preschools in their communities. With all of Baltimore's beautiful parks, that is an exorbitant amount of potential.

Outdoor preschools promote the mission and the three guiding pillars of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks — healthy recreation, conservation, and social equity. Baltimore City Recreation & Parks Carrie Murray Nature Center and Carrie Murray's Forest Preschool staff and teachers strongly believe that increasing the opportunities for children to learn outdoors will benefit the City and the State of Maryland. Support children, families, and communities.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 376.

Written Testimony for HB 376.pdf

Uploaded by: Rebecca Morris

Position: FAV

Written Testimony for House Bill 376
Rebecca Morris

My name is Rebecca Morris, and I am the mother of Peter, a student who attended the Notchcliff Forest Preschool one morning a week last school year. Peter has cerebral palsy. He uses leg braces and a walker for mobility, wears hearing aids, and has a variety of language and communication delays.

Peter is now six, and over the years he has experienced a variety of excellent educational and therapeutic settings. He requires the care and expertise of skilled special educators and therapists, and these providers work mostly in indoor settings with structured programs focused on goals and objectives.

When I learned of the outdoor preschool program at Notchcliff, I knew I wanted my son to have the opportunity to learn in a whole new way – to explore and play with peers in a classroom that was unlike any he'd ever experienced.

Because of his needs, he required a dedicated adult assistant for the program. We were fortunate that I could provide that assistance. My support enabled Peter to participate in parts of the program that would have otherwise been inaccessible. Throughout the year, I saw him grow to love the independence of using his walker to travel the forest trail on his own; to play modified games of hide and seek in the meadow; to sled down hills with his classmates; and to enjoy puppet shows and puzzles with outdoor themes.

The outdoor preschool experience gave my son a feeling of confidence and independence, and a sense of control over his learning that he has rarely ever felt. The program allowed him to explore, take risks, and experience natural consequences, all within a supportive and safe outdoor learning environment.

My son certainly benefited from attending an outdoor preschool program, but it was only possible because I could attend with him.

Licensing outdoor preschools is the way to make them accessible for all students, including those with special needs who require dedicated adult support. I have seen the power of outdoor early childhood education for my son, and I know it has the potential to provide enormous benefit for so many other students with special needs.

Thank you for considering HB376.

Rebecca Morris

HB 376_CBF SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Robin Jessica Clark

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

House Bill 376

Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment

Date: February 10, 2022

Position: **Support**

To: Ways and Means, Environment and Transportation From: Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 376, which establishing the Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program in the Maryland State Department of Education to license outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs in order to expand access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs and to investigate the benefits of outdoor, nature-based classrooms.

Research shows that children benefit from outdoor learning at all ages.

Time outside benefits social, emotional and cognitive development in children, including the youngest learners – the preschool age group targeted by this legislation. A recent article on the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy blog of Columbia University's Teachers College states, "Research has shown that children who spend more time outdoors at school are often more physically active and perform higher intensity activities. Being outside can also improve students' mental and emotional health and overall wellbeing."¹ The Chesapeake Bay Foundation's educational programs are founded in part on the value of outdoor learning. Each year, CBF's Maryland education program serves about 10,000 students and teachers at education sites in Annapolis, Baltimore, Washington D.C., Havre de Grace, and at island sites on the Chesapeake Bay.

This legislation will support additional and enhanced outdoor education opportunities for preschool students through supporting five to ten outdoor preschool programs over a three-year pilot period. An early introduction to nature-based learning will benefit these children, and hopefully spark an interest in future outdoor learning experiences.

Outdoor education has demonstrated health benefits and should be accessible to more children.

Outdoor education is not only a learning opportunity, it also has demonstrated health benefits for students, and there are ways to incorporate outdoor learning into many different curriculums. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation seeks to provide students from across Maryland with outdoor educational experiences, and to reach teachers with outdoor education training. With grant funding, CBF is able to reduce program fees which benefits economically disadvantaged students and schools. This legislation will promote additional access to outdoor education for preschool students by licensing new programs with the explicit intent to expand access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 376. For more information, please contact Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.

¹ Apfelbaum, Leora. [COVID-19 as an Opportunity to Increase Access to Outdoor Learning](#), Teachers College, Columbia University, Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy blog, September 1, 2021.

HB376

Uploaded by: Rosa Hance

Position: FAV



Sierra Club Maryland Chapter
P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Ways and Means

Testimony on: HB 376 "Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment"

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 10, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club submits this testimony in support of HB 376. Access to early childhood education that is centered on nature-based exploration is critical to cultivating the next generation of environmental stewards. Licensing for Outdoor Preschools will help existing nature-based preschools reach children in low income areas and with special education needs. Additionally, we believe that in the future the expansion of this pilot licensing program will encourage the creation of more high quality nature-based outdoor education programs for preschool children and beyond.

Young children benefit from an early start to healthy lifelong habits. Numerous peer reviewed studies point to the improvements in mood and overall health and wellness outcomes. Recent studies show that interactions with nature boost mood in adolescents,¹ support a strengthened immune system,² and improve problem solving, critical thinking and self-discipline³ – all critical for today's youth.

Piloting a licensing program for Outdoor Preschools will support access to nature by underserved communities. Working families need access to high quality full-day education yet currently there are limits on the length of time Outdoor programs can be offered because they cannot be licensed without indoor building space. State vouchers can only be used by licensed providers. Providers cannot access professional development offered by the Maryland State Department of Education if they are not using the licensure program and conversely cannot be vetted for credentials. HB 376 would offer a pathway forward to improving family, student, and teacher experiences with outdoor preschool programs.

For these reasons, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly recommends a favorable report on HB 376.

Rosa Hance
Chapter Chair
Rosa.Hance@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

¹ Zhang Y, Mavoa S, Zhao J, Raphael D, Smith M. The Association between Green Space and Adolescents' Mental Well-Being: A Systematic Review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020;17(18):6640. Published 2020 Sep 11. doi:10.3390/ijerph17186640

² Andersen L, Corazon SSS, Stigsdotter UKK. Nature Exposure and Its Effects on Immune System Functioning: A Systematic Review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021;18(4):1416. Published 2021 Feb 3. doi:10.3390/ijerph18041416

³ Kuo M, Barnes M, Jordan C. Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship. *Front Psychol*. 2019;10:305. Published 2019 Feb 19. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

Outdoor Preschool Testimony - House.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Taylor Smith-Hams

Position: FAV



February 8, 2022

Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot (HB0376)
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairperson Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Blue Water Baltimore is a nonprofit organization with a mission to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment and thriving communities. As part of our work, we offer educational ecoliteracy programs for all age ranges. **We write today in support of Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot (HB0376).**

Here are some reasons why this pilot program is important:

- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to State scholarships or special education services and are cut off from the benefits of nature-based early childhood education because immersive outdoor preschools currently cannot be licensed;
- A staggering number of child care programs in Maryland have closed during the Covid-19 pandemic leaving a shortage of options for families. Outdoor preschools offer an alternative form of child care at a time when many families seek the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors; and
- 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.

As Blue Water Baltimore's Ecoliteracy and Restoration Specialist, I have the privilege of teaching students about Baltimore's waterways and the urban water cycle. Last summer, I asked a class of students with the SummerLIT program (formerly SummerREADS) if anyone knew how the water cycle might be different in a city. One student responded by describing how Baltimore's three-pipe system works. He said he knew about the pipe system because "someone taught me this" the last time he participated in the program two years ago. I didn't care that he didn't remember me, just the fact that he retained the concept and was now sharing the information with his mostly younger classmates demonstrates how impactful ecoliteracy and environmental education can be.

We urge a favorable report on HB0376.

Sincerely,
John Marra
Ecoliteracy & Restoration Specialist

HB376 LoS.pdf

Uploaded by: Victoria Brusafferro

Position: FAV

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

(443)-379-7058

2206 Pelham Ave. Baltimore MD, 21213

HB 376_MFN_FWA_Macsherry.pdf

Uploaded by: Clinton Macsherry

Position: FWA



Testimony Concerning HB 376
“Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment”
Submitted to the House Ways & Means Committee
February 10, 2022

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Maryland Family Network (MFN) respectfully requests an amendment to HB 376, which would require the Maryland State Department of Education by August of this year to establish a three-year pilot program for up to 10 newly defined “outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care program[s].”

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and early childhood education, as well as other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that children, along with their parents, have access to high-quality, affordable programs and educational opportunities.

The concept of outdoor preschools, which operate without indoor space, is intriguing but has not been sufficiently vetted in Maryland. Indeed, only one other state has enacted legislation permitting outdoor preschools. Left unanswered here are fundamental questions: under whose authority and under what recognized standards do outdoor preschools currently operate in Maryland? How are children’s basic health and safety needs ensured? What evidence exists to guide best practices and document children’s outcomes?

MFN would support and happily participate in a more deliberate process to explore the outdoor preschool concept thoroughly, arrive at answers agreed upon by multiple stakeholders, and report back to the General Assembly. MFN strongly believes such an examination should precede the establishment of up to 10 pilot programs. HB 376 regrettably circumvents this necessary step.

In materials they have distributed, the proponents of the legislation acknowledge “the need to conduct a careful review of COMAR 13.A regulations to address these points of concern.” MFN concurs. Therefore, prior to such careful review, MFN urges the Committee to adopt the following amendment: On page 3, in line 11, strike "MAY" and insert "SHALL NOT."

HB 376_MSCCA_FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Isaac Meyer

Position: FWA



**Caring For Maryland's Most
Important Natural Resource™**

Maryland State Child Care Association

2810 Carrollton Road
Annapolis, Md. 21403
Phone: (410) 820-9196
Email: info@mscca.org
www.mscca.org

The Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) is a non-profit, statewide, professional association incorporated in 1984 to promote the growth and development of child care and learning centers in Maryland. MSCCA has over 5000 members working in the field of early childhood. We believe children are our most important natural resource and work hard to advocate for children, families and for professionalism within the early childhood community.

**Testimony: HB 376
Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program-Establishment
Support with Amendment
Submitted to: Ways and Means Committee
February 10, 2022**

On behalf of the Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA), thank you to Delegate Guyton for recognizing the importance of nature-based play, the importance of licensing and regulation for health and safety and the innovation to explore and expand the benefits of outdoor classrooms in Maryland as a collaborative pilot program over three years.

MSCCA has over 5,000 members who are adhering to close to fifty pages of rigorous COMAR regulations as the foundation of health and safety which children and families deserve and expect when choosing legal, licensed child care/early childhood education programs. MSCCA respectfully requests an amendment to Section 9.5-1103(C) that would prohibit the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) from waiving existing child care licensing requirements to meet the needs of the pilot (see amendment following the testimony). This amendment would preserve the Department's ability to modify regulations to supports the safe and authentic participation in the pilot.

Current childcare-center licensing standards are primarily designed for indoor settings. Without a license, outdoor preschools cannot offer full-day options or access state scholarships that assist low-income families with child care costs.

MSCCA fully supports the convening of an advisory group of practicing nature-based learning programs to inform and implement this pilot program as well as consider the ways to measure outcomes and success.

Our priorities agenda includes the expansion and access of affordable, quality child care/early learning programs for families and aligns with the intent of HB 376.

MSCCA believes children are our most important natural resource. The focus of this pilot is to investigate the benefits of outdoor, nature-based classrooms for children. Some of the numerous, important benefits of outdoor preschools include, improved gross motor skills, lower rates of obesity, more resilience and confidence, milder ADHD symptoms and less likely to get sick. These are outcomes that have far reaching health benefits and should be explored fully.

Maryland has lost approximately 15% of child care programs since the pandemic. Mental health issues continue to increase. We must rebuild and reimagine early childhood programs for a stronger and innovative future for children.

MSCCA urges a favorable report only with amendment.

**Amendment to House Bill 376
Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment**

Submitted on behalf of MSCCA

Amendment No. 1

On page 3, line 11: After “**DEPARTMENT**”, strike “~~**MAY WAIVE OR**~~”

On page 3, after line 13: Insert: “**(D) THE DEPARTMENT MAY NOT WAIVE EXISTING CHILD CARE LICENSING REQUIREMENTS TO ALLOW FOR THE OPERATION OF THE PILOT PROGRAM.**”