

HB 525 - Allison I Charapp - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV



Date: March 17, 2023

Senate Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, The Environment Committee:

My name is Allison I Charapp, and I am an Education Director who resides in Annapolis, Maryland. I have been teaching for over 30 years as a Montessori Teacher with training in Reggio Emilia and Orton-Gillingham.

I am the founding Director of Tree of Life Preschool at Congregation Kol Shalom here in Annapolis. In 2015, we were the 5th nature preschool to open in Maryland. Since then, we have grown dramatically – my small little Jewish nature preschool has attracted quite a diverse population – we are colorful – I have families representing all the continents on Earth. Families practicing many religions – Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian – all celebrate the gift of nature together.

Families find us for various and obvious reasons. But I want you to consider one of them right now – many young children – not a small lot of them – need more than what has become a traditional preschool experience. Families have come to me with YOUNG children who were not successful in their current preschool. They could not conform on demand to the needs of that structure. For far too many children, their NEEDS – developmental, emotional, and social cannot be balanced while indoors. A century ago, we began using the word WORK in reference to a child's activity. It was meant to garner respect for their time and focus. But today, WORK in many preschool programs simply limits the child. Work has become a cage for too many...

I believe that education opens doors and must be taught well and clearly. I believe that children should be mightily challenged – not pushed. But, academics – learning – is not confined by walls.

Through free play in nature we watch each child think, plan, evaluate, succeed, fail, join others, move apart, create, deconstruct, and even find peace. This is NOT wasteful. This demands our respect and our effort. This Outdoor Pilot Program would secure this mission.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;

- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

An outdoor educational program supports the emotional, behavioral and intellectual development of preschoolers. Studies have shown that students who learn outdoors develop: a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, exploration of ideas, decision making and problem solving. Outdoor learning connects families and the community to the school and being part of student learning.

Lawmakers need to vote in support of the bill. Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Allison I Charapp, M.Ed.

Education Director, Congregation Kol Shalom

Director, Tree of Life Preschool at Kol Shalom

1909 Hidden Meadow Lane, Annapolis, MD 21401

allison@kolshalomannapolis.org

Cell: (443) 871-4126

Home address: 300 Meares Court, Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 525 - Angela Mudd Rahmani - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Angela Mudd Rahmani, and I am parent who resides in Annapolis, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

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- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Schooling with a foundation in nature and a significant amount of time outdoors is something all kids deserve and what we were privileged to offer our oldest through Tree of Life preschool. It supports curiosity, a respect for the natural world around us, and true learning through the best lens possible- the outdoors. My only regret is that we could not find a way — as two working parents — to continue this type of schooling for her when it was time to enter elementary school

(public school is a far cry from her preschool experience). I am thankful our youngest will soon begin preschool and get to embark on this same magical experience that all kids deserve.”

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Angela Mudd Rahmani

Chris Rahmani

Parents of Eve Rahmani '21 and Felix Rahmani (future student)

508 Birch Drive Annapolis, MD 21403

angelanmudd@gmail.com (301)785-9264

HB 525 - Anne Arnold - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Anne Arnold, and I reside in Galesville, in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

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- Outdoor preschools promote 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 certificate in Elementary Education and have taught second through fifth grades in public schools for 14 years. Nevertheless, I was unfamiliar with outdoor preschools prior to having my own children. When the pandemic shutdown occurred, I found myself home with my then 15 month-old daughter. I quickly discovered that our days passed more quickly and my entire family life remained more harmonious if my daughter spent several hours per day outdoors. At the beginning, I started with two hours, and by the end of that summer, we often spent seven to eight hours a day playing outside! I saw firsthand how much it benefitted my daughter in

terms of not only her physical and emotional health but also what I previously thought of as academic learning. While I struggled to encourage her to sit at a table inside for more than a minute or two, she excelled at counting when we used rocks in the yard, and she learned to write her name in the sand.

After witnessing this growth, I began to research extensively on my own. I learned about all the research that confirms the value of time outdoors not only for children but for all humans! Thus, when it came to transition her from an in-home daycare to a school around age three, I knew that time outdoors (rain or shine) was a nonnegotiable criterion in choosing a program for her to attend. We found Tree of Life Preschool and its nature-based program, and a year later, my daughter continues to thrive and absolutely loves school. While she still has another whole year of Pre-K next year, she already meets most of the Kindergarten Readiness benchmarks that we test for at the elementary school where I work. My husband and I will undoubtedly choose the same program for our younger daughter as soon as she is old enough.

Every child deserves the opportunity to experience a connection to nature and the well-being it brings to their mind, body, and soul. This bill is a chance to expand the possibilities of Early Childhood Education in Maryland in an important and positive way. Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same.

Sincerely,

Anne Arnold

Anne.megargel@gmail.com

434-242-3395

4840 Curch Lane

Galesville, MD20765

HB 525 - Colleen Grubb - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Colleen Grubb and I reside in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

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- Outdoor preschools promote 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 three young grandsons. My daughter, a single parent living in Anne Arundel County, and I searched for affordable, preschool programs over the last several years. We found no available options. There are programs in Anne Arundel County that are excellent, but not available for new enrollees. There were options that were truly cost prohibitive – think in terms of tuition costs of University of Maryland for the three to attend. As a net result, my daughter did not work and stayed home with the children until elementary school started.

I urge you to vote in support of the bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot. The community needs more options for quality early childhood education.

Sincerely,

Colleen Grubb
428 Schoolers Pond Way
Arnold, MD 21012

Tgrubb1@aol.com (443)336-3091

HB 525 - Dawn Kreisberg - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV



Date: March 17, 2023

Senate Education, Energy and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, Environment Committee:

My name is Dawn Kreisberg, and I am an Early Childhood Director who resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

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An outdoor educational program supports the emotional, behavioral and intellectual development of preschoolers. Studies have shown that students who learn outdoors develop: a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, exploration of ideas, decision making and problem solving. Outdoor learning connects families and the community to the school and being part of student learning.

Lawmakers need to vote in support of the bill. Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Dawn Kreisberg

Early Childhood Director

Ohr Chadash Academy -7310 Park Heights Ave

Baltimore, MD. 21208

410-999-2200

dkreisberg@ohrchadashbaltimore.org

HB 525 - Julie Dieguez - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Energy, Education, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill

Dear Honorable Energy, Education, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Julie Dieguez and I am an educator and parent who resides in Annapolis, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

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I have been an environmental educator for 22 years. I currently develop outdoor classrooms, play and learning areas for Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Prior to this, I worked closely with the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources on environmental

literacy standards for schools and increasing opportunities to encourage and facilitate students, educators, families to learn and recreate outdoors. I have worked closely with the Eastern Association of Forest & Nature Schools and directly with preschools and daycares across the state to encourage and develop sustainable, safe and effective outdoor play and learning spaces for children and educators. I ask that you please support this very worthy and needed bill. Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Dieguez

Anne Arundel County Public Schools: Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center

thewildchildllc@gmail.com (301)651-9397

HB 525 - Linda Thoms - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Linda Thoms. I'm a teacher, and I have been working with children for 37 years from age 2 up to 15 years old. I reside in Anne Arundel County, Arnold, Maryland.

I've been working in my present outdoor preschool for over two years now, and the effect nature has on children is incomparable to the common indoor environment we all know of. Children get to learn social skills, tolerance, patience, sharing, exploring, get to see life cycles of insects, birds and more.

This issue is so important to me, because I can see how children thrive playing outdoors with simple things such as bricks, rocks, planks, and being on a nature trail, running with their friends, maybe even discovering a new flower, or even their first bumblebee of the year.

All of this affects me in a wondrous way,- how I get to explore the wonder of nature, again as an adult!, through the eyes of the children.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

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- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

You as a lawmaker need to vote in support of this bill.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,
Linda Thoms

linda.thoms@hotmail.com

Phone: 4849952219
1202 Julie Court
Arnold, MD 21012

HB 525 - Marta Potter- March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Marta Potter, and I reside in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

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I have worked at Tree of Life Preschool for eight years. I come from 40+ years of work as a park naturalist. I bring to the school a love and respect for nature; I have shared my love and respect of nature by offering nature walks, science experiments, and constant enthusiasm for the outdoor world. I have seen a sense of wonder, a sense of appreciation, and respect for nature from the smallest beetle to a large vulture flying overhead grow within all our children. They love being outside at all times - in all weather - discovering what the animals and plants are doing. They like to learn about the importance of how and why everything works. I believe the

outdoor experience and respect for nature needs to be available for all children in Maryland. Even in the urban environment, there is nature. No one should go without this opportunity.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Marta Potter
922 Beacon Way
Annapolis, MD 21401
443-758-7307
Potter.marta2@gmail.com

HB 525 - Oona Page - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Oona Page Miller, and I reside in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

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Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Oona Page

oonatic@gmail.com

410-980-3988

3121 Munz Drive, Annapolis, MD 21403

HB 525 - Rabbi Philip Pohl - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Charapp

Position: FAV

March 20, 2023

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Energy, Education, and The Environment Committee:

My name is Philip Pohl and I am a retired rabbi who resides in Annapolis, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

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- Outdoor preschools promote 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 was the rabbi at Congregation Kol Shalom in Annapolis when the Tree of Life PreSchool opened and I witnessed, first hand, the physical and education health benefits the school provided to the students and their families. I am most proud to have been associated with this achievement.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Rabbi Philip Pohl

RPPohl1@gmail.com; 410-266-7311

1927Manor Grove Road, Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 525 pdf Outdoor Preschool pilot program written

Uploaded by: Christina Peusch

Position: FAV



**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 advocates on behalf of our 5000 members working in the field of child care/early childhood education. We believe children are our most important natural resource and work hard to advocate for children, families and for professionals within the early childhood community.

**Testimony: HB 525
Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program-Establishment
Testimony: Support
Submitted to: Education, Energy and Environment
March 22, 2023**

MSCCA supports HB 525. Thanks to Delegate Guyton and co-sponsors 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 a three years.

MSCCA has over 5000 members who are adhering 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 appreciates and supports HB 525, especially related to adhering to the integrity of the licensing regulations and EXCELS standards. The Department will have the ability to adapt and NOT waive any regulations for the purpose of this pilot. MSCCA supports the safe and appropriate adaptations of regulations and EXCELS to allow for 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 a pilot 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 and diverse child care/early learning programs for families which aligns with the intent of HB 525.

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 10% 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.

HB 525_MFN_FAV_Macsherry X-OVER.pdf

Uploaded by: Clinton Macsherry

Position: FAV



Testimony Concerning HB 525
“Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment”
Submitted to the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 22, 2023

Position: Favorable

Maryland Family Network (MFN) supports HB 525, which would require the Maryland State Department of Education 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 yet not been sufficiently vetted in Maryland. Indeed, only one other state has enacted legislation permitting outdoor preschools. The proposed pilot program could help identify factors that will need to be addressed for full-scale licensing and operation.

In the meantime, however, some fundamental questions are unanswered: 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? Under the timetable in the bill as amended, the State will have the opportunity to address these issues and proceed deliberately with necessary baseline standards in place.

MFN urges your favorable consideration of HB 525.

Support of HB 525 - Outdoor Preschool License Pilo

Uploaded by: Colby Ferguson

Position: FAV



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

3358 Davidsonville Road • Davidsonville, MD 21035 • (410) 922-3426

March 22, 2023

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of HB 525 - Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment**

On behalf of our Farm Bureau member families in Maryland, I submit this written testimony in support of HB 525, legislation that establishes the Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program in the State Department of Education to license outdoor, nature-based early learning and childcare programs. The purpose of the programs is to expand access to affordable, high-quality early learning and child-care programs and investigate the benefits of outdoor, nature-based classrooms.

MDFB Policy: We commend the Maryland Commission on Education in Agriculture for its study and report concerning the enhancement of agricultural education in the state. We support the Commission's recommendations to improve and enhance education in agricultural programs throughout Maryland, especially the improved agricultural curriculum in Grades Pre-K-12 and the recommendations for new and upgraded facilities. We encourage the continued efforts of the Governor to expand and improve agricultural curriculum in the Maryland public school system.

We support increased funding for Pre-K through 12th grade agricultural education programs.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 525 & REQUESTS A FAVORABLE REPORT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colby Ferguson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Colby Ferguson
Director of Government Relations

For more information contact Colby Ferguson at (240) 578-0396

HB525 Written Support- Outdoor Learning.pdf

Uploaded by: Demaune Millard

Position: FAV



Testimony in Support of House Bill 525

Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment

To: Chair Brian Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee

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

Date: March 22, 2022

Family League of Baltimore (Family League) supports House Bill 525 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 HB525 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

BaltimoreCounty_FAV_HB0525.pdf

Uploaded by: Joshua Greenberg

Position: FAV



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive

JENNIFER AIOSA
Director of Government Affairs

AMANDA KONTZ CARR
Legislative Officer

JOSHUA M. GREENBERG
Associate Director of Government Affairs

BILL NO.: **HB 525**

TITLE: **Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment**

SPONSOR: **Delegate Guyton**

COMMITTEE: **Education, Energy, and the Environment**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: **March 22, 2023**

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 525 – Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment. This legislation would establish a pilot program to license outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs.

As many residents return to in-office work following the COVID pandemic, many still have trouble obtaining access to childcare services. Without proper access and availability of child care programs, parents are currently forced to choose between staying home with their child or attempting to find a more expensive form of child care. This prevents children from experiencing the benefits of education and socialization that early childcare programs have to offer.

As a father and a former educator, Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski is committed to ensuring that all children have access to quality day-to-day child care. HB 525 would establish a pilot program offering an alternative to pre-kindergarten education by allowing for the licensing of outdoor, nature-based early learning programs. These programs would not only provide parents with a more diverse set of options for their child’s care, but also provide the opportunity for children with otherwise limited access to open and green space to learn more about nature and enjoy time outside in a controlled environment.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 525. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.

HB525- Support- Antioch University.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

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, 2023
Re: Support for HB 525 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 525, 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)

HB525- Support- Backyard Basecamp.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV

February 8, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

Re: Support for HB0525 - Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

My name is Atiya Wells, and I am a pediatric nurse and the Founder and Executive Director of Backyard Basecamp, an urban environmental education organization based in Baltimore City. I urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

I fell in love with nature about ten years ago when I went on my first hike. After learning more about the natural world, I recall feeling both excitement at learning what lives around me and a deep sense of grief. Growing up, I did not have outdoor experiences because my family didn't have discretionary income for these programs and activities.

As my two children have grown, we have struggled to find the integration of nature into the education system in Maryland, as we have seen in other parts of the country, especially in early childhood education. Of the programs offered, they are either too far from us or highly cost-prohibitive to our income level.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- Research has shown that time outside has led to better children's social, emotional, and academic outcomes
- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities, and those with special needs, do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing requires these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and an unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of childcare programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of childcare across Maryland;
- To operate, MSDE should vet teachers and programs for early childhood credentials, including specific health and safety training. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote skills and values that lead to environmental literacy, which supports the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature goals, the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights, Baltimore Connecting Children to Nature, and the *K-12 Environmental Literacy Standards* required for graduation in Maryland.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Thank you,

Atiya Wells BSN, RN

Atiya.Wells@yahoo.com | 443-226-4783

4706 Moravia Road Baltimore, MD 21206

HB525- Support- Educator Amy Beam_.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV

Date: 2/7/23

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Amy Beam and I am a preschool teacher who resides in Montgomery County MD.

I am writing to implore you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Amy Beam

Recipient of the 2015 Margaret O'Neill Early Childhood Nature Educator Award

Amy.BeyondTheWalls@gmail.com

11421 Rambling Rd
Gaithersburg MD 20879

HB525- Support- Forest Explorers.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV



Forest
Explorers

February 6, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Shannon Earle and I am a small business owner, educator and parent who resides in Montgomery County, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

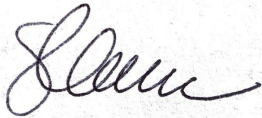
There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

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- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 my MS in Environmental Education and my early childhood teaching certificate. I served on the board of the Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery School, taught at the Nature Forward Nature Preschool for five years and currently run my own business offering all-outdoors nature education programs to elementary-aged children. Not only would licensed outdoor preschools be a progressive addition to Maryland's early childhood education options for families, it would also provide an excellent small business opportunity, while ensuring high-quality professional programs.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Earle', written in a cursive style.

Shannon Earle

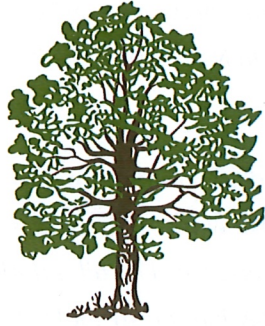
forestexplorerstakoma@gmail.com / 301 512 9007

711 Ritchie Ave, Silver Spring, MD 20910

HB525- Support- Genesee Valley Outdoor Learning Ce

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV



Genesee Valley

Outdoor Learning Center

1717 Rayville Road Parkton MD 21120

February 7, 2023

Ways and Means Committee¹

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Jane LaMonica and I am the General Manager of Genesee Valley Outdoor Learning Center which is located in Northern Baltimore County.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
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- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and

- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Genesee Valley Outdoor Learning Center (GVOLC) has been providing outdoor programs for 40 years. I personally have been working at GVOLC for over 35 years and have witnessed firsthand the importance of experiential outdoor education. One of the most impactful experiences I recall is during COVID. We opened GVOLC to our community for in person virtual learning. Seeing the struggle of students trying to figure out how to understand averages on a computer screen was very difficult. The staff decided to explain averages by taking them outside with a scale, tape measure and a fishing rod. They proceeded to catch 5 fish and measure them, weigh them, write the measurements down and calculate to find what the average fish size was in that pond. Magic pure magic happened when the students realized how to find the average of something....Being able to use the outdoors as a classroom opens up so many opportunities for exploration, discovery and using your imagination.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,



Jane LaMonica
General Manager
Genesee Valley Outdoor Learning Center
Geneseevalley.org
1717 Rayville Road
Parkton, MD 21120
jlamonica@geneseevalley.org

HB525- Support- Little Reds Early Childhood Center

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV



February 7, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Alice Wetzel and I am an administrator and educator who works at Little Reds Early Childhood Center at Roland Park Country School and resides in Baltimore City, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of childcare programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 prior high school Environmental Science and Biology teacher I know how important it is for children to have these early interactions with nature. This exposure to the natural world gives them a scaffold to later attach information. The overwhelming majority of our great environmentalists all had early childhoods filled with time outdoors. If we want to solve some of the global environmental issues we are facing, we need to make sure that children are connecting to nature at an early age. I have spent over 2 decades advocating for children's rights to be outside. Please join me in pushing forward this crusade to make sure all children have access to ample time in the most amazing place children can learn – the great outdoors.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Alice Wetzel

Alice Wetzel P'22 P'23 P'26
Early Years Coordinator

Pronouns: She, her, hers
Roland Park Country School
5204 Roland Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21210
(443) 339-2240
<https://www.rpcs.org/academics/little-reds>



Home address:
2208 South Road
Baltimore, MD 21209

HB525- Support- Parent Brooke Balderson_.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV

To whom it may concern:

I am a strong supporter of nature preschools and have personally watched my two sons thrive and flourish as a result of nature preschool programming. My son Isaac, now 8, attended Tree of Life at Kol Shalom from age 3 to age 5. If there was an opportunity to send him for kindergarten at the time, I would not have hesitated. My son Wren is currently in his first year at Tree of Life nature preschool and despite never having been in a daycare situation before, he has transitioned seamlessly thanks to the engaging programming of nature preschool. He is immersed daily in outside play and learning. He comes home discussing experiences, exploring, and experiments they have conducted. He has made friends and learned so much in just a few short months.

I strongly believe every child should have access to outdoor nature education and preschool. I am a tremendous supporter of Bill 525 and undoubtedly believe it should be passed.

Sincerely,
Brooke Balderson
410-533-8243

HB525- Support- Parent Leslie Stepler.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV

February 8, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Leslie Stepler and I am a parent who resides in Takoma Park, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 had the opportunity to attend the Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery Schools all outdoor program during COVID and it was a wonderful experience. It completely changed my views on the importance of outdoor education and learning. She always loved being outdoors but being able to spend so much more time during her critical preschool years was so important to her growth and development. I am happy to speak with anyone further and continue to extol the power of outdoor learning.

Please vote in support of this bill - it is so important for children everywhere!

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Leslie Stepler

lesliestepler@gmail.com, 301-43708461
6427 Orchard Ave, Takoma Park, MD 20912

HB525- Support- Parent Shea Franquez.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV

02-Feb-2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Shealynn Franquez and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, Port Republic, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
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- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of childcare across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 my daughter is enrolled in Little Bugs Nature Preschool in Prince Frederick Maryland. She has been attending 5 days a week since June and it has changed her entire outlook and demeanor. She used to be very fussy, sad and act out at simple things. Now, since being outside consistently, she is happier, more creative, imaginative and overall more calm when at home. Being outside is her niche and we would have not learned that without an outdoor preschool where she is safely learning her limits. Just yesterday it was raining and she yelled "Go outside!!" because she has learned to embrace and love the rain. This outlook on life is beneficial in all aspects- physical and mental. Children have the rest of their lives to be indoors- it's so important for them to enjoy and make a habit of being outdoors. Every child deserves the opportunity to learn in a setting that looks different than your typical preschool. With the passing of this bill, outdoor preschools may become more common which is a beautiful way for children to learn and families to see what being outside really can do.

Please vote in support of the HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill. You will be changing children's lives and how they learn forever.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Shealynn Franquez

shealynnborreson@gmail.com

910-398-7723

3934 Shamrock Lane, Port Republic, MD

HB525- Support- Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery Sc

Uploaded by: Katie Rooney

Position: FAV



Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery School, Inc.

8204 Flower Avenue • Takoma Park • Maryland • 20912
301.585.7272 • www.takomacooperativeschool.org

February 8, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee;

I am a teacher and director of a parent cooperative school (parents own and operate the school) in Takoma Park, Montgomery County, Maryland. Our School was established in 1942 and in 2001 we lost our lease and moved to the only available space, a small bungalow, on Flower Avenue. The move saved our school, but it also, required us to downsize our full day program to half day and partial week. Since the move, we have looked for our “forever home.” We have found that home. It is right where we are and it embraces the outdoors.

Moving towards licensing outdoor schools will guarantee that we will be able return to a full day, full week program which so many families in our community need. Licensing will ensure that families and children have access to the same quality the Office of Child Care shapes for schools which offer indoor programs.

Our school community supports the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot.

Sincerely,

Lesley Romanoff

Cell 301-980-1796

Romanoff@tpcns.org

HB525- Support- Educator Alexia Savold.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support for HB 525: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Alexia Savold and I am an educator and parent who resides in Towson, Baltimore County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
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- Outdoor preschools promote 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 currently the Assistant Director of The Nature Preschool at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills. I was an early childhood educator for 5 years at The Nature Preschool 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 fallout of 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 help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB525!

Sincerely,

Alexia D Savold

Alexia Savold
alexiaadolce@gmail.com (202) 595-4183
90 Murdock Rd
Baltimore, MD 21212

HB525- Support- Educator Katie Holbrok.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2-9-2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Katie Holbrook and I am an educator who resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

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- Outdoor preschools promote 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 who primarily live in Baltimore City do not get to experience nature the way children in other areas do. It is essential that these children can receive the same opportunities. Outdoor education

serves to create children who love and care about nature and the environment. Without exposure to the outdoors; children will not care and the environment will suffer as a result.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Katie Holbrook

Katie Holbrook

Katieholbrook94@yahoo.com

Baltimore, Maryland

HB525- Support- Heather Potter.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2-11-23

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Heather Potter and I am an advocate in Anne Arundel county.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need

lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education; Children from low-income communities and those

with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship, such as my daughter. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;

Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of

child care across Maryland;

Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor

preschools in Maryland; and

Outdoor preschools promote 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 was blessed with the opportunity to attend tree of life preschool with her grandmother as a student with a teacher discount, that without it we would not have been able to afford.

Through her time at this school I saw her become independent and brave, educated, loved, and loving. She has faced many struggles through her time as well due to abuse and her father and I splitting up but the one thing that has remained a source of stability

for her has been this school. All children deserve a chance to experience level of support from caring and qualified teachers that go above and beyond to ensure the safety of their students inside and outside of their school walls.

Please vote for this bill to help all children like my daughter.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Heather potter

3523 Leslie way apt 204

Laurel MD 20724

HB525- Support Little Bugs Nature Preschool.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



01/31/2023

RE: Support for HB525: 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

422 Deane Avenue

Prince Frederick, MD 20678

littlebugsnaturepreschool@gmail.com

443-975-8510

HB525- Support- Little Lilac Preschool.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Kayla Souza and I am a licensed childcare provider, educator, and parent who resides in Hagerstown, Washington County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 bill is personally important to me as the parent of a preschool aged child who receives early intervention support. Research has shown that time in nature supports brain development, builds strength, boosts immunity, and regulates the body systems. As a child with a history of brain injury, it's extremely important to me that my child has access to an environment that emphasizes outdoor time. When I was looking for options for her when she became preschool age, it was extremely difficult to find

a nature based program that was able to work with her special accommodations. Nature is a benefit to all children (and adults), but especially those with a history of medical diagnosis, life trauma, or who for various reasons may be at-risk in the future.

Please vote in support of this important bill. I have been an early childhood educator for over 20 years, both in the classroom and the childcare setting, and I fully believe that a licensed outdoor preschool option in our state would provide benefits that would be seen for ALL parties, even years down the road.

Help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kayla Souza". The ink is a light grey color.

Kayla Souza

littlelilapreschool@gmail.com

301-452-6773

9912 Stephanie Lane

Hagerstown, MD 21740

HB525- Support- Magothy Cooperative Preschool.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



Magothy Cooperative Preschool
3705 Mountain Road
Pasadena MD 21122
410-360-0292

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

We are Lindsay McDermott and David Schroeder, the directors of Magothy Cooperative Preschool operating in Pasadena Maryland. We are writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot.

We provide a high quality, licensed preschool opportunity to over 60 families per school year. We spend the vast majority of our school day outdoors, utilizing multiple outdoor classrooms, playgrounds, and trails. Despite this, current licensing regulations focus almost exclusively on our indoor classrooms. We treat our outdoor spaces as classrooms, and maintain them to the same safety and educational standards as our indoor classrooms. However, they are not recognized as classrooms and therefore have no bearing on our licensed capacity. In short, we could run our current program without using our indoor classrooms (with the exception of hand washing and toileting) but we could not be a licensed program without them.

Outdoor education and being in nature has tremendous benefits to children and their families. We have witnessed first hand how being in nature inspires a child's curiosity, inquisition, observation and language. Being able to engage all of their senses and have hands-on learning has led to deeper connections and an intrinsic desire to learn more. We have learned that most anything we can do indoors we can also do outdoors, and often find it to be more enjoyable and less prone to sensory overload. While among the trees, sunshine, and fresh air we have observed our students have a more positive attitude towards themselves



Magothy Cooperative Preschool

3705 Mountain Road

Pasadena MD 21122

410-360-0292

and their peers. While caring for the world around them our students develop empathy for all living things, even wiggly ones. When starting our days outdoors we have seen a drastic decrease in our student's separation anxiety from their grownups and an increase in their self awareness. Being outdoors means all kinds of weather, leading to sequential planning, self-help skills, resilience, and awareness of one's needs. We have also witnessed a positive effect on students' gross motor skills. Our students regularly navigate uneven surfaces, balance and climb. Their confidence in their physical abilities has soared as their use is integrated throughout most of our day.

We also believe that licensed child care brings numerous benefits to children and their families, increasing safety, teacher qualifications, and student educational standards. We urge you to support the HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill to help join the benefits of outdoor education and licensed child care, and increase access to high-quality outdoor preschools to all families.

Sincerely,

Lindsay McDermott and David Schroeder

Directors

Magothy Cooperative Preschool

director@magothycooperative.org

www.magothycooperative.org

410-360-0292

HB525- Support- National Wildlife Federation Lette

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



National Wildlife Federation

Mid-Atlantic Regional Center
151 West Street, Suite 101 • Annapolis, MD 21401 • 443-759-3400

Date: February 10, 2022

Bill: HB 525, Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Position: Favorable

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

The National Wildlife Federation respectfully requests a favorable report for **HB 525 – 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.

An outdoor preschool licensing program would benefit Maryland 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;
- Hundreds of child care programs in Maryland closed as a result of 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 (now Project Green Classrooms) and the K-12 Environmental Literacy Standards required for graduation.

As one of the nation's oldest and largest wildlife 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 – parents, grandparents, or other trusted caregiver – are the two factors that most contribute to individuals choosing to take action to benefit the environment.

By passing HB 525, Maryland will be taking a meaningful step towards expand access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 525.**

Sincerely,

Jennifer Mihills

Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Regional Center
443-759-3403 | mihillsj@nwf.org

HB525- Support- Nature Learning Collective.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



02/12/2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Lisa Poe and I am the co-chair of Nature Learning Collective, an organization that specializes in providing nature-based education for parents, caregivers, educators and child care providers across the state.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and



- Outdoor preschools promote 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 organization was started in 2021, when we realized that more educators were looking for ways to play outdoors and learn with nature. We have hosted conferences, workshops, and virtual training. We have also had the honor of presenting at nationwide conferences such as the annual conference for the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Throughout our journey we have heard the educators advocate for outdoor learning and the mental health benefits that learning in nature has had for their students and themselves. Many of them want to start programs like these, but often lack the indoor space needed to be approved by licensing.

We believe

- Licensing Outdoor Preschools will create additional child care spaces across the state which are desperately needed
- Early Childhood educators working in this field are resourceful and passionate about learning outdoors
- The teachers have and will gain the tools to be successful running an outdoor preschool
- Families are looking for these types of programs and want their children to be outdoors more
- Children from low income families deserve to participate in programs like these
- Creating equity and removing barriers for outdoor learning

I am encouraging you to vote YES on this bill to change the future of our young children and make a difference!

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Lisa Poe

Lisa Poe
naturelearningcollective@gmail.com

422 Deane Avenue

Prince Frederick, MD 20678

HB525- Support- Parent _ Educator Jasmin Field.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Ways and Means Committee of the State of Maryland

February 9, 2023

My name is Jasmin Field and I am a former Pre-K Teacher and current Homeschooling parent in Harford County, MD. I can not begin to explain the benefits and growth I've witnessed through Outdoor learning with my own children as well as our surrounding community.

Through my completion of a nature-based learning certification through ERAFANS, I was inspired to interact with nature even more. Creating tangible experiences with water, mud, trees, leaves, rocks and more encouraged children within our community to refrain from typical toys last summer, when I launched an Outdoor Classroom on our property! Watching the hunger for natural learning was truly inspiring, as their exposure to nature was limited through the local schools they attended.

As branches were painted, self-made rivers were formed, log-based animal forts were built and imaginative camping adventures fueled group problem-solving activities, the elements of nature strengthened their focus and group work skills. It was an honor to watch and be a part of! I was grateful to expose both my own children and surrounding neighbors with these wonderful adventures that continue to help them "think out of the box" today.

I am ever hopeful that more parents venture outdoors with their little ones, embracing the sounds, textures and beautiful visuals nature has to offer. It is truly an experience unlike any other.

Thank you for your consideration in forwarding the HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Bill.

Jasmin Field

HB525- Support- Parent _ Educator Rebecca Gilmor.p

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Rebecca Gilmor and I am an educator and parent who resides in Annapolis, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 an educator, I have read extensive research on the benefits of outdoor education and enrolled my own child at Tree of Life which is a nature based preschool in Annapolis. Our daughter has loved her two years there and I am saddened it is her last year and that she will spend so much more time indoors next year at school. Our children benefit mentally and physically from these outdoor programs and we need more of these in our state. Every day I have picked her up from school and she has been full of joy and excitement over what a great day she had at school.

Please vote to support this bill so that more children can come home happy every day from school the way mine has.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Rebecca Gilmor

815 Bay Ridge Ave.

Annapolis, MD 21403

HB525- Support- Parent _ Educator Tamara Cohen Let

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Tamara Cohen and I am a parent, homeschooler, nature-based school administrator and advocate who resides in Anne Arundel County, Annapolis, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 mother of 2 and when it was my daughter's time to start pre-school, I knew I wanted to put the work into making the right decision. After spending 3 years with my daughter, I knew her favorite thing was to spend time in the garden. She would spend time (even at this age) looking up at the clouds, examining the birds and feeling the bark of trees. We would stop on our walks to watch a woodpecker, later see the holes and even the swarm of ladybugs it may have been enjoying for lunch. My point here is that our children are drawn outdoors and the traditional preschool would have eliminated many of those hours outside. We found Tree of Life Preschool in Annapolis through a friend attending their free Parent/Child nature classes. It was perfect! My daughter spent 2 years there. She spent her time examining, playing, laughing – all the things a child needs to learn. She left pre-school kindergarten ready. As a result of COVID, we decided to homeschool. However, with her child-led, nature-based preschool education, I was able to move forward without a bump. She began reading in kindergarten without any added pressure and also learned to follow trail markers and climb trees. Life is the best with nature and fresh air surrounding us! My son is currently attending Tree of Life preschool and will be kindergarten ready for the next school year.

This is the time! Our culture is moving more and more towards diagnoses and screens but our answer is nature. In a natural environment, children, with little or no adult input, learn how to work with their hands, math, physics, engineering, biology, geography, how to regulate their temperament and they exercise without a routine. It is the foundation for families that will spend time on walks instead of in front of the TV, it is a generation that will be better self-regulated, have an outlet for their energy and understand better the world around them. All of this ...and it is an environment that is less conducive to the spreading of viruses! Now is the time to make outdoor education a new cultural wave.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Tamara Cohen

Tamara Cohen, MBA
957 Seahorse Court
Annapolis, MD 21409

HB525- Support- Parent and Educator Michele Miller

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 8, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Michele Miller, and I am an educator and parent who resides in Baltimore County, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of childcare programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of childcare across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Michele T. Miller

Michele T. Miller

Michelegenealogy@aol.com 410 377 4169

6207 Beechwood Road, Baltimore, MD 21239-1526

HB525- Support- Parent Andrea Kneessi.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 10, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Andrea Kneessi and I am a parent who resides in Ann Arundel County, Arnold, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 3 year old daughter, Adaline, was having a lot of anxiety and struggling in a more traditional learning environment until we switched her to an outdoor focused school. The Tree of Life Preschool, in Annapolis, MD has been a godsend. Since beginning at her new school, we saw an immediate change in Adaline's confidence, social skills and overall attitude towards learning and education. Our daughter has

always been more relaxed and focused in an outdoor learning environment. We see this in both her mood and in her behavior. As such, we believe that the outdoor nature of the school is a large part of her recent educational success and wish to support more schools of this type.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Andrea Kneessi, DC

Andrea Kneessi

alubaway@gmail.com

248-459-3327

923 Whitstable Blvd

Arnold, MD 21012

HB525- Support- Parent Brittany Ashanti.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2/12/2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Brittany Davis and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, Chesapeake Beach MD area.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
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- Outdoor preschools promote 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 feel this opportunity is important to incorporate in the lives of all children as outdoor/nature school allows a kid to be a kid while being educated simultaneously. Free play and child lead learning helps keep a child's imagination and creativity flowing. I know this to be true because my child attends Muddy

bugs outdoor program and he is thriving. He loves to be outdoors, he's brave and independent and this program helps nurture that. My husband and I are so happy we found this program because its perfect for educating our child based on the way he learns. We feel as though all kids should have this opportunity.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Brittany Davis

Brittashanti@gmail.com 202-905-5504

8340 legacy circle Chesapeake beach MD 20732

HB525- Support- Parent Brittany L. Petrosik_.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 10, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

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

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

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- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 went to Magothy Cooperative Preschool in Pasadena, Maryland. The experience they had there was incredible. The caring environment and the ability to connect with nature, themselves and others made a big difference in my children's early development. Being outside in all seasons and all kinds of weather helped develop resilience and made for fun experiences and memories being made daily. Because it was a Cooperative, as a helping parent I was able to witness all of this first hand.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brittany L. Petrosik", written in a cursive style.

Brittany L. Petrosik

brittpetrosik@gmail.com

301-580-4980

180 Diana Drive

Pasadena, Maryland 21122

HB525- Support- Parent Grace Yaa Fordman Letter of

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

10 February, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB0525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Grace Yaa Fordman and I am a parent who resides in Montgomery County, Silver Spring, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resources families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

On a personal note, my 4-year-old son Phineas has blossomed as a student at an outdoor preschool – the Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery School (TPCNS) in Takoma Park, MD. When he started at TPCNS he was behind his peers in gross motor, fine motor, and speech skills. Now he is excelling in all areas – to include social-emotional skills, conflict resolution, and resiliency. The outdoor classroom affords unlimited opportunities to engage with others and the environment in ways that support childhood development and kindergarten readiness. Words cannot express our gratitude and joy to be part of the TPCNS outdoor school community – we strongly recommend lawmakers such as yourself vote in support of the bill.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Respectfully,

Grace Yaa Fordman

Grace.fordman@gmail.com

Phone: 240-595-5863

700 Sligo Ave Apt 208, Silver Spring, MD 20910

HB525- Support- Parent Michael Fechtmann.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 11, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Michael Fechtmann and I am a parent who resides in Lusby, MD in Calvert County.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
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- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 Lily (3) started attending an outdoor preschool last summer and has truly blossomed with her experience there. I recently took her for a hike and was blown away when she correctly identified a beech tree. I marveled at her confidence and creativity as she climbed up the root system of a giant fallen tree and declared it her castle. That one fallen tree provided a canvas for such deep creative play that we were there for almost an hour. I feel so lucky that

we got through the waitlist to secure a spot for her in the one outdoor preschool in our county, but I would love to see more programs like hers available and accessible throughout the state.

With the many threats to our environment posed by climate change, raising environmentally conscious people is essential to our future. There is no better way to instill a connection with nature than by providing children the opportunity to learn and play outdoors, to build an intimate knowledge of the natural world early on.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by voting to support the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Michael Fechtmann
mfechtmann@gmail.com
609.933.8463
11845 Blue Point Court
Lusby, MD 20657

HB525- Support- Parent Polly Schandorf Letter of S

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Date Feb 8, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Polly Schandorf and I am an parent who resides in Anne Arundel County Annapolis, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 has had the benefit of being in a Outdoor Preschool program for the last two years. My son has been able to grow so much socially and academically in this environment. The increased outdoor time allows him to get all the big movement he needs to be able to focus during the lesson times in the classroom. He has been able to learn inside and outside of the formal learning environment. He has excelled at math and is really set up for success. When we take a walk at home he is identifying plants

trees and birds, some of which I don't know! He has grown up loving his environment and getting to enjoy the outdoors no matter the weather. I also strongly believe that having lots of outdoor big body movement and learning means that he is more prepared for focused classroom learning time. He is happier, healthier and has further grown his huge love of learning than if we didn't have this Outdoor Preschool. I think the state would really benefit from more Outdoor Preschools.

Please vote in support of this bill.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Polly Schandorf". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and contact information.

Polly Schandorf

pollysileo@gmail.com

898 Coachway Annapolis, MD 21401

HB525- Support- Parent Sara Witting.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2-9-2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

House Bill 525 is essential for the expansion of outdoor-based preschools for your youngest constituents. Both of my children, now ages 9 and 5, attended outdoor-based preschools. This time in nature fostered a love of learning and emotional intelligence. These skills will last a lifetime!

My five year-old can excitedly talk to you about invasive species of plants. Like any kid, she loves collecting rocks, but she can also identify quartzite versus shale. Kids are innately curious, and it seems like immersion in the sounds, scents, and textures of nature both satisfies and grows this curiosity. It's infectious, and my husband and I find ourselves wrapped-up in our daughter's questions and excitement.

My 9 year-old attended an outdoor preschool, and some days in the forest were hard. On days that were cold and rainy, he had to summon an inner-toughness and learn to plan for what gear he would need. On warm sunny days he could verbalize appreciation for the weather. No matter the weather, he came home contentedly exhausted. Today, he has an intelligence for the type of calm that comes from playing hard outside. He's figured out that when he's feeling irritated or angry, it's time to put away the screens and go outside. In a technology-driven world, I know he can always find balance when he needs it.

I wish every kid had access to this type of early childhood education. It has been absolutely critical for my kids' development. I am endlessly grateful to the teachers who made these programs available to our family. Schools that foster curious learners with emotional intelligence? Yes, please!

Sara Wittig

136 Great Lake Dr.

Annapolis, MD 21403

HB525- Support- Parent Savannah Cody.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Savannah Cody and I am a community member and parent who resides in Montgomery County Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 oldest child currently attends an outdoor school and has thrived there. It has been such a positive experience and very different from his previous preschool. It would be amazing if his little brother can also attend a couple of years from now. Considering the state of the globe and effects of climate change that we are already feeling, it is crucial that our generation and the next learn about and genuinely appreciate nature so we can work to save what we have left.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Savannah Cody

savannah.m.cody@gmail.com (202)-734-1271
13047 Sheffield Manor Drive, Silver Spring MD 20904

HB525- Support- Parent Shyamala Cohen Letter of Su

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Shyamala Cohen [7 years old] and a graduate from nature pre-school. I am in 2nd grade and my favorite subjects are science and math.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot.

I had a really good experience at my pre-school and I hope everyone can have the same experience that I did. I want everyone to go to an outdoor preschool. The experience was so happy. The teachers were so nice. All the kids were nice there. We went outside so much of the day. Our day would start outdoors, then come in the classroom for an activity, have snack and go back outside again before lunch. We did experiments every day, they taught me how to count, we played with sand, we made mud pies, rolled down hills and went on nature walks through trails [on the property.]

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,
Shy Cohen

Shyamala Cohen
957 Seahorse Court
Annapolis, MD 21409

HB525- Support- Parent Solange Long.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 10, 2023

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 HB525 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.

Nature based education has been important to our family. Our 5-year-old daughter has attended a nature based preschools for three 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 HB525. We hope that you will support this important effort and vote in favor of HB525!

Quote about Fall: "The trees are about to show us how lovely it is to let things go."

Sincerely,

Solange Long

scharb12@gmail.com, (443) 975-1435

425 Heron Landing Way Prince Frederick MD, 20678

HB525- Support- Parent Tori Millsaps_.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Date 2/10/2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Victoria Millsaps and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, MD. I have 5 children.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. Three of my children have participated in a local program similar to what this bill supports and it left me wanting more! My kids thrive outside, as do most!

This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Victoria Millsaps

tbyrd14@hotmail.com

410-610-3168

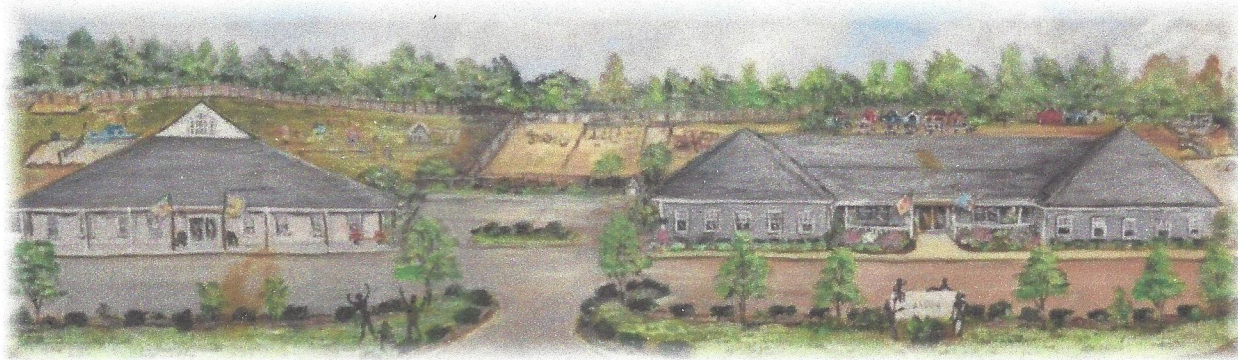
1815 Harvest Grove Ln,

Prince Frederick MD 20678

HB525- Support- Prime Time Child Care Center.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV



Prime Time Children's & Youth Activity Center, 8816 Donald's Way, Owings, MD 20736 301-855-2221 301-855-2146 Fax: 410-257-0996

I am in total support of the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot, hopefully the ability to have Outdoor Preschool Programs throughout our state.. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need our lawmakers to act on this very important legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- As with any child care program all teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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. The state approved and promoted curriculum which focuses on Children Discovering their World has an entire component on things to do outside, we know The University of Maryland and John Hopkins University who developed the curriculum know the value of OPENING THE DOOR TO EXPLORE, we hope you do too.

We have been providing the service of child care as well as before and after school children for 35 years in Calvert County. Our centers have had outdoor classrooms for more than 15 of those years as we believe that taking advantage of the outdoor environment is paramount in our industry. Yes, our programs are unique and certainly were in the early 2000's, but we believe that getting the children outside to play, learn and grow is what a high quality early learning program should include. All research shows that most of the brain is developed in the first 5 years of life and there are only 2000 days between birth and kindergarten, that is when experiencing all we have to offer is our job. You allowing and in fact promoting outdoor preschool programs that soar through a pilot program will only enhance our industry and help to ensure that our children - our future is rich in these experiences as we develop and experience opportunities that are good for our environment and excellent and memorable for our children.

At Prime Time Children's & Youth Activity Centers we spend generally 5 of our 12 hours a day outside. Going from the outdoor classrooms to our trike tracks, our outdoor theater and town. Then on to our swings, slides, sandboxes, gardens, basketball court, field for sports and such, covered and sunny, circled by trees with access behind our fences to nature trails and even bubbles and windows in our fences that give our children access to our neighbors one of which is a sand and gravel company and the other is a storm drain management area that fills and empties with the weather. Taking in sights and sounds of animals, insects and such in their natural environment. Rich and plentiful. Unique and rewarding to any and all children in our program. We do this because we know the value of what outside affords our children. With you promoting it in our state, hopefully others will also see the value in doing the same. Feel free to come and play with us anytime, you too can see why you should pass this bill and do it now, not in 2-20 years.

Regards,



Brenda Tyrrell

Brenda

Brenda@primetimeecc.com

301-855-2221 fax 410-257-0996

HB525- Support- Wonder in the Wild_.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 9, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Katey Nelson and I am the director of Wonder in the Wild, a nonprofit outdoor school located in Queen Anne's County on Kent Island. We provide hands-on nature play and environmental education programs to local "explorers" of all ages. We would like to expand our programming, but cannot without legislative change.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Wonder in the Wild plans to open a full-time nature preschool on the grounds of Camp Wright as soon as outdoor preschools are able to be licensed in the State of Maryland. There is a desperate need for childcare in the area. Many parents are not able to work because they cannot find childcare or affordable care. Additionally, many children thrive in outdoor learning environments, as we are able to provide hands-on, inquiry-based education and opportunities to learn through play. Learning outdoors also better equips the next generation of environmental stewards to care for our beautiful surroundings.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,



Katherine Nelson, Director Wonder in the Wild

Contact Information:

Wonder in the Wild Outdoor School

wonderwildoutdoorschool@gmail.com

400 Camp Wright Lane Stevensville, MD 21666

Mailing Address: 1102 Marion Quimby Drive Stevensville, MD 21666

HB525- Support-Heather Symons.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2/12/23

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Heather Symons and I am a pediatric oncologist and parent who resides in Anne Arundel County, Arnold, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 pediatric oncologist and the parent of four children—ages 15y, 13y, 12y, and 4y. Our 4yo has been attending an outdoor preschool and we could not be happier. More importantly, HE could not be happier. From the moment he started preschool at Tree of Life in Annapolis, Maryland he has felt at home. This school has fostered his love of the outdoors—from bugs to nature walks, planting and rock collecting he always has a smile on his face. On more than one occasion, our 4yo has walked outside and stated simply, “what a beautiful view.” The mother in me sees how outdoor education encourages his creativity, fosters both connection and independence, develops social skills, and and helps in overall wellbeing. The physician in me understands the benefit to his overall health. The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that, “the earlier you share nature with your baby, the more likely they are to develop a life-long love of the outdoors... build nature sculptures

with twigs, leaves, acorns, rocks and more. More outdoor time is linked with improved motor development and lower obesity rates and myopia (nearsightedness) risk. Safely getting some sun also helps us make vitamin D that our bodies need to stay healthy and strong. Research also shows that when children spent time in natural settings they had less anger and aggression. Impulse control is also better. Stress and depression are lower for people who spend time in nature. Children can also show increased focus and reduced symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Playing outside promotes curiosity, creativity and critical thinking. Studies have found that children who spent more time in nature exploration had improved learning outcomes. ([AAP Offers Tips for Keeping Kids Active, Healthy Through Outdoor Play](#)).”

All kids should have the benefit of safe, accessible outdoor education.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heather Symons".

Heather J. Symons, MD, MHS
Associate Professor, Oncology and Pediatrics
Clinical Director, Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplantation
Hsymons2@jhmi.edu
4435277033
101 Asquithoaks Ln
Arnold, Md 21012

HB525-Support- Educator and Parent Anne Arnold.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 10, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Anne Arnold, and I am an elementary school teacher and parent of two who resides in Galesville, in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland. We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 certificate in Elementary Education and have taught second through fifth grades in public schools for 14 years. Nevertheless, I was unfamiliar with outdoor preschools prior to having my own children. When the pandemic shutdown occurred, I found myself home with my then 15-month-old

daughter. I quickly discovered that our days passed quickly and my entire family life remained more harmonious if my daughter spent several hours per day outdoors. At the beginning, I started with two hours, and by the end of that summer, we often spent seven to eight hours a day playing outside! I saw firsthand how much it benefitted my daughter in terms of not only her physical and emotional health but also what I previously thought of as academic learning. While I struggled to encourage her to sit at a table inside for more than a minute or two, she excelled at counting when we used rocks in the yard, and she learned to write her name in the sand.

After witnessing this growth, I began to research extensively on my own. I learned about all the research that confirms the value of time outdoors not only for children but for all humans! Thus when it came time to transition her from an in-home daycare to a school around age three, I knew that time outdoors (rain or shine) was a nonnegotiable criterion in choosing a program for her to attend. We found Tree of Life Preschool and it's nature-based program, and a year later, my daughter continues to thrive and absolutely loves school. While she still has another whole year of Pre-K next year, she already meets most of the Kindergarten Readiness benchmarks that we test for at the elementary school where I work. My husband and I will undoubtedly choose the same program for our younger daughter as soon as she is old enough.

Every child deserves the opportunity to experience a connection to nature and the well being it bring to their mind, body and soul. This bill is a chance to expand the possibilities of Early Childhood Education in Maryland in an important and positive way. Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Anne Arnold

anne.megargel@gmail.com

434-242-3395

4840 Church Lane

Galesville, MD 20765

HB525-Support- Parent Alison Anuzis.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 11, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Alison Anuzis and I am a parent who resides in Lusby, MD in Calvert County.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of childcare programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of childcare across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 Lily (3) started attending an outdoor preschool last summer and has truly blossomed with her experience there. I recently took her for a hike and was blown away when she correctly identified a beech tree. I marveled at her confidence and creativity as she climbed up the root system of a giant fallen tree and declared it her castle. That one fallen tree provided a canvas for such deep creative play that we were there for almost an hour. I feel so lucky that

we got through the waitlist to secure a spot for her in the one outdoor preschool in our county, but I would love to see more programs like hers available and accessible throughout the state.

I believe that time in nature is essential for human growth and the antidote to a lot of the stressors we all face today. Many years ago I worked for a summer internship program where high school students from low-resourced families in an inner-city area came to a historic site to help tend the grounds. It was more exposure to nature than any of them were used to and I was struck by their responses to being in that environment. They enjoyed the safety and quiet, were able to relax in ways they couldn't closer to home. They were able to get perspective on problems they faced day to day. I believe these benefits are even more important for younger children.

With the many threats to our environment posed by climate change, raising environmentally conscious people is essential to our future. There is no better way to instill a connection with nature than by providing children the opportunity to learn and play outdoors, to build an intimate knowledge of the natural world early on.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by voting to support the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Alison Anuzis
Alison.anuzis@gmail.com
609.933.8463
11845 Blue Point Court
Lusby, MD 20657

HB525-Support- Parent Brittany Pogar.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 10, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Brittany Pogar and I am a parent who resides in Prince Frederick, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;

Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;

Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and

Outdoor preschools promote 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, Claire is the youngest in our family at 4 years old, and her experience at a nature preschool has inspired so many changes in our family. We love spending time outdoors and appreciate nature daily. We take things slow and appreciate the beauty around us. I wish all of my children could have experienced an outdoor school, and perhaps if they were more common and more recognized they would have. I believe this bill will help to make nature preschools more mainstream so that all families can experience the joy that mine has the last two years.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,
Brittany Pogar

HB525-Support- Parent Brooke Balderson.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 11, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Brooke Balderson and I am an educator and parent who resides in Crownsville, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Modern classrooms require new ideas and new approaches. We are currently educating children for jobs and professions that do not yet exist. We need to think outside the box and get outside. We need to remove the rows of tables and chairs, allow children to do what they do best; grow, learn, and explore the world around them. Instead of stifling their creative processes and shutting down their exploration

inside a classroom, we need to help them learn from the natural processes of the earth and to become global stewards of the world around them.

Lawmakers should support this bill. Our students and children desperately need it. Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Brooke Balderson

Brooke.Balderson@gmail.com

389 Holly Trl

Crownsville, MD 21032

HB525-Support- Parent Caitlyn Heinz (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Caitlyn Heinz and I am a parent and community member who resides in Edgewater, Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

As a military spouse who moves every 3 years, the one thing that we wanted, no matter where we are in the country, was a quality outdoor preschool for our children. This has become quite the challenge to find and has highlighted the massive deficit we have of outdoor nature preschools. When we moved to Maryland, "outdoor preschool. Nature certified preschool", anything that would allow my son to have a healthy balance of nature and a nurturing environment to make learning possible. The options were incredibly slim, and locations out of my area. This means I need to be privileged enough to have adequate transportation, time, and money to make this happen. There are absolutely no preschools in our city/town that have an outdoor component. This needs to change.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Caitlyn Heinz

Caitlyn Heinz

caitlynheinz@gmail.com, 410-980-0378

2945 Edgewater Drive, Edgewater MD 21037

HB525-Support- Parent Chris Marshall.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Date 2/10/23

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Chris Marshall and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education; Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;

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Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Little Bugs Nature Preschool, in particular Lisa Poe is our daughter and families hero. The nature schooling she provides our daughter is unlike any early education program.

My daughter who started the program when she was 2 has grown leaps and bounds in every aspect, but especially emotionally, mentally, and verbally. She's learning to listen, be brave, resilient, empathetic, and kind. We believe all preschools like little bugs should be licensed and that you should vote in support of this bill because it would afford anyone the chance to have Lisa Poe as their hero too. She is the most giving, loving, attentive, and creative teacher I know and deserves to have what this bill would afford her.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Chris Marshall

8350 Legacy Circle

Chesapeake Beach, MD 20732

HB525-Support- Parent Lindsay Couch.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2/10/2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Lindsay Couch and I am an parent who resides in Calvert County Maryland.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education.
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families.
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of childcare programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and

Outdoor preschools promote 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.

When my first son was just 2, my friends started sharing their children's adventures at Little Bugs nature preschool. The moment I saw what they were experiencing, I KNEW this would be the best source of early childhood education for my children. At this point, I must have reached out once a month hoping for an opening and praying, I was still on the waiting list. There are virtually no other programs like this, and I wanted in. Outdoor classrooms are the type of experience every child should have the opportunity to explore.

My son, as well as his classmates, *love* going to school every day. The experiences they are able to have is amazing. My son is much more comfortable navigating his body in nature, his confidence and social skills have flourished, and his creativity has soared. They play/learn in all weather, rain, shine, hot, cold, snow, etc. and it's created children who persevere. The number of moms who are looking for play-based learning is astronomical, there is a demand. Parents want their children to learn in their natural environment.

The type of children that will be created by having these experiences will be a generation of confident, motivated, well-communicative adults with a healthy relationship with their environment.

Please vote in favor of this bill.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Couch

8620 Thornberry Ct

Owings, MD 20736

HB525-Support- Parent Mary Bryan- Jackson.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

February 11, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Mary Bryant-Jackson and I am a parent who resides in (Calvert County, Owings, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 very important to my family and me. My 3-year-old daughter has been attending two outdoor preschools for the past 6 months. I chose these schools because my daughter loves nature, animals and being outside. I had no idea how, in just 6 months, my daughter would benefit from everything that she has gained and learned from these programs. My daughter's programs have given her a newfound confidence in her everyday life. The unconventional, outdoor classrooms have allowed my daughter to learn in a way I never thought

possible. It promotes her love of mother nature while fostering her learning of numbers and letters, etc. She has developed deeper critical thinking and fine/gross motor skills. I know that these programs would benefit so many children in our community as well as our state.

I implore you to please vote in support of this bill.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Mary Bryant-Jackson

Mary Bryant-Jackson

mhbryant84@gmail.com, 443-995-5384

6895 Bayberry Crossing, Owings, MD 20736

HB525-Support- Parent Rachael Tanner.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Rachael Tanner and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;

Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;

Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;

Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and

Outdoor preschools promote 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 has been SUCH a huge blessing to our family! Our Covid baby, who is now almost 3 is thriving. I don't think you'd ever know she was born in a time when we were all isolated and those social interactions that are so important weren't really ideal. I strongly feel like this has to do with being outside, in the fresh air, and playing with other kids. We moved from a county where there were only one or two outdoor preschools and they were very expensive! Our other kids didn't get the benefit of the outdoor school and we are so blessed to have found the one we attend now. We are even more blessed that we can afford it now. That isn't the case for a lot of families and it's really unfair to those kids! Outdoor preschools should have the support they deserve so that ALL children can have easier access to them.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Rachael Tanner

HB525-Support-Parent Erin Burke.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2/11/2023

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

For the last two summers my daughter has spent 6 weeks attending an all-outdoor nature camp in Baltimore City. It has been 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. 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. 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 HB525 would allow organizations and families alike.

Sincerely,

Erin Burk

HB525-Support-Parent Jasmine Atkins.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

2/11/2023

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Jasmine Atkins and I am a parent who resides in Harford County, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

- All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education;
- Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;
- Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;
- Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and
- Outdoor preschools promote 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 currently attends preschool at a fully outdoor program. So, I have personally seen the many benefits of outdoor preschool. My child has benefitted educationally, socially, physically and emotionally. I attribute much of this to her time in nature preschool. Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same. Doing so would help make outdoor preschool accessible to more families to enjoy!

Sincerely,

Jasmine Atkins

Jasmine@erafans.org

HB525-Support-Parent Meagan Marshall.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Poe

Position: FAV

Date 2/10/23

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Meagan Marshall and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, MD.

I am writing to urge you to support the House Bill to establish an Outdoor Preschool Licensing pilot. This bill has 13 co-sponsors and tremendous support in counties across Maryland! We need lawmakers to act by passing legislation to expand safe, equitable access to outdoor preschools as another form of high-quality early childhood education.

There are many urgent reasons why we need to pass the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill:

All children deserve safe, equitable access and the ability to choose outdoor preschool as an option for high-quality early childhood education; Children from low-income communities and those with special needs do not have equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship. Licensing is required for these families to use State scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool. This is an environmental justice issue and unfair barrier that disproportionately impacts low-resourced families;

Outdoor preschools offer an alternative that can help expand high-quality early childhood education options. Hundreds of child care programs closed during the pandemic leaving a shortage of child care across Maryland;

Teachers and programs should be vetted for early childhood credentials, including specific training in health and safety, to operate. Without licensing, there is no oversight of existing outdoor preschools in Maryland; and

Outdoor preschools promote 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.

Little Bugs Nature Preschool, in particular, Lisa Poe is our daughter and family's hero. The nature schooling she provides our daughter is unlike any early education program.

My daughter who started the program when she was 2 has grown leaps and bounds in every aspect, but especially emotionally, mentally, and verbally. She's learning to listen, be brave, resilient, empathetic, and kind. We believe all preschools like little bugs should be licensed and that you should vote in support of this bill because it would afford anyone the chance to have Lisa Poe as their hero too. She is the most giving, loving, attentive, and creative teacher I know and deserves to have what this bill would afford her.

Please help us champion an outdoor preschool licensing pilot by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Meagan Marshall

8350 Legacy Circle

Chesapeake Beach, MD 20732

HB 525 - Senate - Favorable - Guyton.pdf

Uploaded by: Michele Guyton

Position: FAV

MICHELE GUYTON
Legislative District 42B
Baltimore County

Environment and Transportation
Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 304
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

HB525 Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program-Establishment

FAVORABLE

March 22, 2023

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,

I am writing to respectfully request a favorable report on HB525 – Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Program – Establishment. This bill instructs the MSDE Office of Childcare to establish a limited pilot in order to study the feasibility of licensure for 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 childcare options and should include urban, suburban and rural areas. Specific guidelines for child safety and hygiene are also specified in the bill and are adapted from a similar program in Washington State.

The benefits to academic, social, and emotional development from participation in a nature-based educational model are 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. They will also not be able to participate in our mixed-delivery Pre-K programs. 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 HB525 to expand access to high quality, innovative, data-supported preschool programs in Maryland.

Thank you,

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

Delegate Michele Guyton D42B

HB 525 Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - E

Uploaded by: Michelle Dietz

Position: FAV

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment 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 525 – Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 525 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 525 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 525.

HB0525-EEE-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

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

HB 525

March 22, 2023

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 525 – Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment
POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 525.

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 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.

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 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.

We respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 525.

SUPPORT - Eastern Region Assoc. of Forest and Natu

Uploaded by: Monica Wiedel-Lubinski

Position: FWA



March 22, 2023

Education, Energy, and Environment Senate Committee
Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: Support HB52 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot

Dear Honorable Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

My name is Monica Wiedel-Lubinski. I am a resident of Glen Arm, MD in Baltimore County and a long-time leader in nature-based education. I urge you to pass HB 525 to create a pilot program for the licensure of Outdoor Preschools in Maryland.

My Master's Degree is in Early Child Education where research demonstrates that play, child-directed inquiry, hands-on experiences, and outdoor learning are not only beneficial for young children's development, they are crucial. But in practice, many traditional early learning and care settings are restrictive, over-scheduled, and have developmentally inappropriate academic expectations of children. As a nature-based educator of nearly 25 years, and a parent of two, the evidence is clear: Early childhood education is exemplified outdoors.

I am honored to be the founder/co-founder of three nature-based preschool programs in Maryland. Each is unique to the needs of the local community and provides nature-based early childhood education to young children. The first program I established is the Nature Preschool at Irvine Nature Center which was Maryland's second licensed, NAEYC-accredited nature preschool. I see an increasing demand for not only licensed nature preschools, but also for immersive preschools that meet entirely outdoors.

In addition to my role as Executive Director of the Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools (ERAFANS), I have collaborated on a number of initiatives including work on the Project Green Classrooms Committee and Baltimore County Green Alliance. I am also one of 10 authors who contributed to the *Nature-Based Preschool Professional Practices Guidebook* published by the North American Association of Environmental Education 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 license outdoor preschool here in Maryland so that more children and families can access its benefits. As it stands, only the privilege few 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 existing child care 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 camps. They run year round, the way any other early learning programs do. They utilize child-directed 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 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 nature are common threads across these programs. Nurturing 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-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. 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.

Perhaps 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, especially because this is a barrier we can remedy through licensure.

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 may 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.

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.

Another respected State department, the Maryland Dept. of Mental Health and Hygiene, already licenses 100% outdoor programs in the summer, without the need for indoor facilities. This aligns in many ways with safety practices that could be in place for outdoor preschools. Given that many outdoor preschools are already licensed by MDH and comply with existing health and safety requirements, this feels like a great place to start with a pilot program. As it stands, the Maryland State Department of Education's Office of Child Care does not acknowledge licensure already in place by their fellow State Dept. for the purpose of 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. However, the benefits of nature-based early childhood education and outdoor preschool are evidence-based and well established. What we need to do is ensure that ALL families have safe, equitable access to outdoor preschool if they so choose this form of early childhood pedagogy. House Bill 525 will provide the opportunity for us to work with MSDE's Office of Child Care to determine the regulations that allow for licensure.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 525 to create a pilot program that will help provide safe, equitable access to outdoor preschool for the children of Maryland.

With Gratitude,

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