

**ANTIOCH
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NEW ENGLAND

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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.

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