



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

Maryland State Child Care Association

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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.