



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;
- 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.

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,



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