

**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.

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.

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

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