

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

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