

February 13, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

**RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!**

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Camarie Vedis and I am a parent who resides in Calvert County, 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-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.

My daughter who is now 7, attended Little Bugs Nature Preschool since she was 3 benefited largely to the practices, philosophies and dedication of her educator, Ms. Lisa Poe. While at Little Bugs, my daughter was cautious. As she has gotten older, we have identified that she has severe anxiety disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder and is being evaluated for ASD. Yet, she is THRIVING academically and considering her diagnosis; socially and emotionally, in school. I have no doubt that the choice to send her to a preschool that promoted, self discovery, self confidence, risky play and open ended creativity aided in her success as she entered elementary school. She still asks to go back to play in the mud kitchen at age 7.

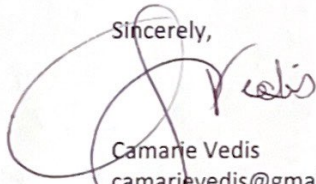
Her younger brother, now 4.5 also attends. He is the definition of confidence in a toddlers body and I am proud to say that I know this is only supported and encouraged at a school like Little Bugs Nature Preschool. He knows names of birds, trees, butterflies, what chickens eat, how to care for animals and nature, confidently say his affirmations out loud when he finds himself in a situation calling for his bravery and knows how to calm himself when he's feeling overwhelmed with deep breathing techniques. He can count to 20 and clearly state his needs wants and desires better than some adults I

know. He also affirms his friends when they need encouragement. He is four. The environment we place our youth in is crucial to their environment. I am SO proud to be able to say we have chosen to engulf our child in an early childhood development program that focuses on compassion, centeredness, confidence, courage and curiosity.

With this being said, I believe this type of early childhood education should be available to everyone. We are blessed to be in a place financially to opt for this type of early educational environment- though I know that is not the case for everyone. I have no doubt that it is every parents desire to have the choice to send their child to such a gem of an educational program as Little Bugs Nature Preschool, should they choose. It is what our youth need. It is what our world needs. They are the future. I believe equipping little minds in this way can be world changing. Our future is bright with little leaders like Ms. Lisa's little bugs.

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! Our future depends on it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Camarie Vedis', written over a large, loopy circular scribble.

Camarie Vedis  
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