



Hummingbird Hill Nature Preschool

February 10, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Heather Quinn and I am an educator, service provider, advocate, community member, and teacher trainer who resides in Reisterstown, MD in 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.

Personally, nature-based education and outdoor learning changed my life during the pandemic. I opened a licensed child care but know that the option for outside all day would be even better. So many reasons, as mentioned above, to make this happen for the children in Maryland. Seeing how children became more mentally accessible in nature confirmed what I already thought. Outdoor preschool is the way to a child's mind and heart.

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,

Heather Quinn

Hummingbird Hill Collective

Nature Programs for Children and Parents

Curious Kits and Two Peas in a Pod

hummingbirdhillcollective@gmail.com

hummingbirdhill.org

Nature Learning Collective

Nature-Based Professional Development and Teacher Training

naturelearningcollectivemd@gmail.com

naturelearningcollective.com

phone: 443-712-8119

“The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness.” – **John Muir**