

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House
Ways and Means Committee - For the Hearing on
Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program – Establishment (HB525)
February 15, 2023
SUPPORT**

Free State PTA represents over 50,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is composed of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. **House Bill 525, Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment, aligns with Free State PTA's 2023 legislative agenda.** Free State PTA (FSPTA) supports House Bill 0525's mission to encourage a play-based academic preschool education.

Childhood access to green space is associated with certain benefits – including improved mental health, decreased chance of nearsightedness, and reduced symptoms of ADHD and hyperactivity. Nature-based preschools provide more than mere access to the outdoors, including improved motor function, risk assessment, problem solving and resilience. Outdoor programs also give children lessons in how to be ecologically conscious - an interest in animals, the importance of picking up litter, recycling, gardening, etc. Nature based schools prioritize time spent learning and playing in nature rather than doing structured, pre-determined activities in a classroom. These activities give children hands-on experience in their own learning such as science, math, pre-writing skills, risk taking, and motor skills.

Research shows that outdoor time for children is dwindling. Nature-based preschools are designed to help children develop cognitive and problem-solving skills, while cultivating social skills and building their confidence through nature, play and exploration. While teachers plan some activities, children are encouraged to change the focus of an activity based on their interest. Free State PTA celebrates Nature in all its beauty and weather, and therefore, strongly urges that this committee issues a **favorable report on HB525**.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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