

Feb 7, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Erin Sprague and I am a Maryland resident parent of two children. We reside in Frederick County in the downtown historic district.

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.

As the mother of a child with special needs, I witnessed the monumental impact of outdoor education and nature based learning during covid. My developmentally delayed then 5 year old daughter made enormous leaps in gross motor skills, fine motor skills, proprioceptive regulation, vestibular capacity and overall self-organization and focus during her year+ of outdoor and nature based learning. She entered traditional kindergarten with confidence, physical strength and curiosity curated during her open air preschool time. I am desperate for a similar option for our now 3 year old son and support this legislation so that there can be increased access to this essential childhood development tool. There is extensive documentation showing that time spent outdoors benefits children's neurological development across their lifetime. This is truly life changing form of education and should be made accessible across the state of Maryland.

I urge you to vote for this bill that will better the lives of families and children in Maryland.

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,  
Erin Sprague  
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21701