
February 6, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

We are Greg and Emma Brownstein and we are parents who reside in Washington, DC. We have the great pleasure of sending our three year old son, Caleb Brownstein, to the Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery School in Takoma Park, MD.

We are 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 – and over the border in Washington, DC. 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.

Our son Caleb's experience at the Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery School (TPCNS) has been transformative. Since starting at TPCNS, he has developed independence, confidence, and problem-solving skills. We adamantly believe that Caleb developed these attributes due in large part to our school's outdoor model. He has learned how to stay warm in the cold, change his plans when it rains, and safely navigate the forests along Sligo Creek Parkway. Perhaps most importantly, his newfound appreciation for and curiosity about nature will make him a better steward of our region's rich natural heritage. We feel immensely fortunate that he has had the opportunity to benefit from an outdoor education. We hope many more children across our region will have the same opportunity.

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,

Greg & Emma Brownstein

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