



February 7, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Alice Wetzel and I am an administrator and educator who works at Little Reds Early Childhood Center at Roland Park Country School and resides in Baltimore City, MD.

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 childcare 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 a prior high school Environmental Science and Biology teacher I know how important it is for children to have these early interactions with nature. This exposure to the natural world gives them a scaffold to later attach information. The overwhelming majority of our great environmentalists all had early childhoods filled with time outdoors. If we want to solve some of the global environmental issues we are facing, we need to make sure that children are connecting to nature at an early age. I have spent over 2 decades advocating for children's rights to be outside. Please join me in pushing forward this crusade to make sure all children have access to ample time in the most amazing place children can learn – the great outdoors.

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,

Alice Wetzel

Alice Wetzel P'22 P'23 P'26
Early Years Coordinator

Pronouns: She, her, hers
Roland Park Country School
5204 Roland Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21210
(443) 339-2240
<https://www.rpcs.org/academics/little-reds>



Home address:
2208 South Road
Baltimore, MD 21209