

**February 7, 2023**

Ways and Means Committee

**RE: Support HB525 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot bill!**

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Sara Santos and I am an parent who resides in Anne Arundel, Annapolis, Maryland.

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.

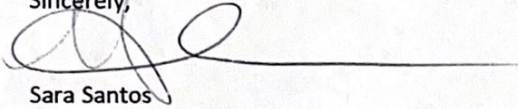
My husband and I sent our eldest daughter Dani to Tree of Life School in Annapolis in the Fall of 2021. Originally, we chose the school because of the connection points of Montessori and Jewish education. I will not lie, the idea of also sending our 3-year-old at the time to a school where they were outside most of the day was a huge selling point, given that we were still in the middle of a pandemic. The experience and education that our daughter has received through outdoor education, has been so much more than we could have ever expected.

I do not know many 4 and half year old's that can identify different types of bugs, birds, or plants correctly, but my child can. Dani is not only learning how to count, read, spell, and write her letters, but she is also learning how to care for, respect and love nature and our planet. In a day in age when most kids want to be on a form of technology to watch something, my daughter would rather be outside exploring.

The education she is getting from Tree of Life is invaluable, and while we will miss it next year when she is in kindergarten, we are beyond excited to send our daughter, Sophie, to the school in the fall.

I urge you to vote in support of the bill. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Santos', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sara Santos

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