



**Date:** February 12, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

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

Dear Honorable Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Allison I Charapp, M.Ed., and I am the founding Education Director of Tree of Life Preschool at Congregation Kol Shalom who resides in Anne Arundel County, 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.

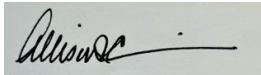
After teaching for 20 years in a Montessori setting, in 2015 I was offered the opportunity to open a new preschool at our synagogue, Kol Shalom. I was charged with (1) creating a nature school and (2) creating

a community that celebrated the Jewish traditions related to nature. We knew from the beginning that we would not be serving ONLY Jewish families, so we adjusted to allow all families to feel connected and welcome. That has worked. We are at capacity for the next two years with applications still coming in for the Fall of 2025. Our community is diverse ethnically, religiously, and financially. The biggest surprise for me has been how “normalizing” their play time in nature has been. I have a school full of children who are happy and curious. It has been amazingly easy to see that their play – their exploration – of basic materials has opened a world of truly challenging thought for them. Their vocabulary grows by leaps and bounds every day. They embrace challenges and work together to find solutions. These skills are the foundations for not only all education, but also for thriving members of our larger communities. I am humbled by the growth that I see in our children. I am heartened that our future has such potential when we ensure that childhood is preserved through both work and play outside.

Creating this school was no easy task. We worked hard to create what was simple – and yet not so simple to have accepted. I am hoping that with your support, we will begin this Pilot Program and create regulations that will inspire many to open more outdoor schools and give all our young children, no matter where they live, the opportunity to have their best childhood. I believe that it is our job to serve the children of our communities with the tools and experiences that lay the foundation for self-construction.

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 on a light gray rectangular background. The signature appears to read "Allison I Charapp" in a cursive script.

Allison I Charapp

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