



**Testimony Concerning HB 525**  
**“Outdoor Preschool License Pilot Program - Establishment”**  
**Submitted to the House Ways & Means Committee**  
**February 15, 2023**

**Position: Favorable with Sponsor Amendment**

Maryland Family Network (MFN) supports HB 525, which would require the Maryland State Department of Education to establish a three-year pilot program for up to 10 newly defined “outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care program[s].” It is our understanding that the sponsor will propose altering the timeline laid out in the bill so the pilots will begin on or before August 1, 2024, and MFN believes this amendment would strengthen the legislation.

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and early childhood education, as well as other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that children, along with their parents, have access to high-quality, affordable programs and educational opportunities.

The concept of outdoor preschools, which operate without indoor space, is intriguing but has yet not been sufficiently vetted in Maryland. Indeed, only one other state has enacted legislation permitting outdoor preschools. The proposed pilot program could help identify factors that will need to be addressed for full-scale licensing and operation.

In the meantime, however, some fundamental questions are unanswered: Under whose authority and under what recognized standards do outdoor preschools currently operate in Maryland? How are children’s basic health and safety needs ensured? What evidence exists to guide best practices and document children’s outcomes? Under the revised timetable established by the sponsor’s amendment, the State will have the opportunity to address these issues and proceed deliberately with necessary baseline standards in place.

With the addition of the sponsor amendment, MFN urges your favorable consideration of HB 525.