



February 25, 2023

Early Childhood and Human Services Committee

**RE: Support HB 2717 Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot Bill**

Dear Honorable Early Childhood and Human Services Committee:

My name is Nicole Dravillas Fravel, and I am a long-time early childhood educator and forest preschool owner who resides in Multnomah County, Portland, Oregon.

I am writing to urge you to support House Bill 2717 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Bill. This bill has support in counties across Oregon and can increase childcare capacity and access for families! Outdoor preschools offer unique physical, cognitive, and social development benefits. Yet many families lack access to outdoor and nature-based experiences, and these inequities often fall across socioeconomic and racial lines. Licensing outdoor preschools is a simple way for the state to increase capacity and create more equitable and accessible childcare options for all families. 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 HB 2717 Outdoor Preschool Licensure 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 resources such as Early Intervention or Early Learning Division Expansion Grants. Licensing is required for families to use state scholarship funds to attend outdoor preschool (such as Preschool Promise or Preschool for All). 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 Oregon;
- Outdoor preschool licensure promotes PreK-12 environmental literacy and supports goals of the Oregon "No Child Left Inside" Act of 2009. It was a recommendation identified in the *Governor's Task Force for the Outdoors 2020 Framework for Action*. It builds off the strength of Outdoor School, and relates to the Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan, Oregon Natural Resources Education Program, Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights and Raise Up Oregon: A Statewide Early Learning System Plan; and

- HB 2717 is part of the comprehensive Children’s Agenda, with support from the following organizations: Outdoor Early Learning Alliance of Oregon, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, Oregon Relief Nurseries, Friends of Outdoor School, Oregon Environmental Council, FACT Oregon, ReadyNation, Oregon Resource Family Alliance, Pro-Choice Oregon, Oregon Kids Read, Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), The Oregon Primary Care Association, Clackamas Women's Services, Community Action Team, Reach Out and Read Northwest, Prevent Child Abuse Oregon, Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force, Children's Institute, Catholic Community Services of the Mid-Willamette Valley, Oregon School-Based Health Alliance, Oregon CASA Network, Willamette Partnership

I have been teaching preschoolers in a nature program for the past 13 years and have personally seen the benefits of outdoor learning for young children in areas of self-regulation, executive functioning and risk-taking. As a former public school kindergarten and first grade teacher, I can attest that these are all kindergarten readiness skills that will help children be successful throughout their academic careers and life. Unfortunately, the lack of licensing standards means that not all families have the option of taking advantage of outdoor preschool education.

Please support HB 2717 to support Oregon’s families.

Please help us champion more childcare capacity and access by supporting the Outdoor Preschool Licensure bill and urging your fellow lawmakers to do the same!

Sincerely,

Nicole Dravillas Fravel