

Date

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 Patricia Saldarriaga and I am an educator and parent who resides in Washington 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 unique from a traditional indoor environment. 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 broad support across the entire state of Oregon and with many organizations

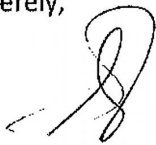
I am mother of three kids and a middle school teacher in Tigard Tualatin School District. My family's experience with outdoor pre-school started with our eldest son. He was first enrolled in a conventional/commercial chain preschool, and even though it was very convenient, we noticed he was missing valuable experiences. Most of the activities were very directed with little room for exploration and creativity.

After doing some research, my husband and I learned the positive effects of outdoor schools in preschoolers. We started to look for outdoor schools in our area and we soon realized the logistic challenges. There were few schools available, and they were very unsuitable for working parents; still, we took the leap and registered him in the nearest outdoor preschool. We made it work through different arrangements: hiring nannies to pick them up and to take care of them until we were back from work, trusting other preschool parents to do the same, and taking two years off from work to be a stay home mom. Later on, our other two kids followed and over the years, we saw the difference between our kids and the kids in our closest circles. We noticed our kids developed curiosity for learning in and outside a classroom (with and without directions), resiliency and flexibility, high kinesthetic skills, and most important of all, they became risk takers.

We look back and any kind of doubt and hesitance we had before disappeared. The two eldest, Sebastian and Dahlia, continued their education at the public elementary school system without any holdback and with a deep love for learning. Our third one, Julian, currently attends Wildwood Nature School as his siblings did. While we are happy and proud of our choice, we realize that we are somewhat privileged. Not many others can even consider sending their kids to these schools because of their limited number, location and parents' availability to take care of their kids for the rest of the day.

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,



Patricia Saldarriaga
Portland, Oregon