



March 1, 2023

TO: House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services  
FROM: Our Children Oregon  
RE: Support for HB 2717

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon (OCO) is a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together ~127 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families.

**We support HB 2717 to streamline the licensure of outdoor preschool programs and close the gaps to accessing preschool for Oregon families.** Currently, there is a severe shortage of child care and preschool options for Oregon families. Only 1 out of 3 children in low-income families have access to publicly funded preschool, leaving nearly 30,000 children without access to preschool before they start kindergarten.<sup>1</sup> Providing a path to licensure would allow existing outdoor preschools to operate for full days and serve more children. This would also increase the state's capacity for child care, an industry that continues to be marked by ongoing challenges like ever-increasing demand and rising costs of care. Furthermore, licensure will allow low-income families to access outdoor preschool through the use of government subsidies and grants that would otherwise be unavailable to non-licensed programs. Thus, licensure for outdoor preschool programs closes early learning and care gaps that fall along economic and racial lines, as well as make entry more equitable and affordable.

Not only will we anticipate higher capacities and opportunities to serve more children, but we will also see an increased rate of positive change in children's overall health. The advantages of outdoor preschool involve encouragement of physical activity, reducing childhood stress, and fully engaging their senses in the natural world.<sup>2</sup> Current programs have already measured these effects on children's physical, social, mental, and developmental health. Studies of children who spend more time outdoors are proven to:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://childinst.org/policyresources/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.neefusa.org/resource/children-and-nature-infographic>

- Develop strong social-emotional skills to connect with themselves and others.<sup>3</sup>
- Decrease the development of ADHD symptoms and moderate symptoms in children already diagnosed with ADHD.<sup>4</sup>
- Reduce the likelihood of illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes.<sup>5</sup>

Licensed outdoor preschool programs are accessible, affordable, and equitable. That is, with the help of HB 2717, we can look forward to a future where more children have the same opportunity to access the benefits of outdoor preschools. We are presented with this unique opportunity to invest in Oregon's children in a way that is sustainable and innovative. By licensing outdoor preschools, we are creating affordable and equitable pathways to learning and care, which is more important now than ever in fostering healthy and happy children.

We strongly urge you to pass HB 2717 to address Oregon's preschool shortage and ensure equitable access of outdoor early learning and preschool programs. Thank you for your time and continued work to improve child wellbeing throughout Oregon. We urge your support for HB 2717.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Ivy Major-McDowall, Policy and Advocacy Director

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

*View the 2023 Children's Agenda at [www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda/](http://www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda/)*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.452.9941&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://cbe.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2020-10/CBEY\\_REPORT\\_HEALTH-NATURE\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cbe.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2020-10/CBEY_REPORT_HEALTH-NATURE_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> "Health and Developmental Outcomes of Nature Play," *Nurturing Early Learning Resources to Support Young Children's Learning in the Outdoors*.