

3/2/2023

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 Samantha Dorsch and I am an Owner, Teacher, Parent who resides in Multnomah County. I operate a outdoor preschool called Under the Trees Forest Preschool.

The list of things I love about outdoor preschool is much longer than anyone wants to read. I love that it teaches children and families how to be outdoors in all weather, which is especially important as it rains 9 months of the year in Oregon. I love the open play that children have to explore mud, branches, leaves, bugs, water, and grass. I love how the environment is educationally stimulating all the time! The seasons are a part of our daily experience. When it is winter in the forest I don't have to explain the changes, students can observe them. I love the connection with the natural world that kids experience. When it rains and the creek floods, kids can notice the flooding. I know the studies show that outdoor preschool build confidence and resilience in kids. I see how creative they are when they are building beaver dens or digging.

I will attach pictures of some of these things but one in particular is a student holding up Salmon bones. One day our local river flooded up our hiking paths. When we were able to return, there was a salmon that had washed up on the path. We got to walk past and notice it decaying throughout the year and by late spring just the bones were left. It opened so many opportunities to talk about how interconnected the flora and fauna of the forest are!

I think it's important for more families to have access to outdoor preschool programs. I have been trying to find a way to join the preschool for all program in Multnomah County because I want families of all backgrounds to have access to Forest Preschool! We believe everyone belongs in the outdoors regardless of income, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, identity, or ability. I think a lot of humans are missing a connection to the natural world. We know that being outdoors improves mental health for adults and children.

I urge you to support House Bill 2717 to establish an Outdoor Preschool Bill and increase access for all families.



Sincerely,

Samantha Dorsch

Portland, Oregon