

Dear House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services,

This letter is to address HB 2717: Establishes oversight of outdoor preschool programs by Office of Child Care, on March 1, 2023 at 1:00pm.

My name is Natalie Gordon and I am an Early Childhood Education Consultant advising the Outdoor Early Learning Alliance of Oregon. I am testifying in favor of HB 2717 because I believe that outdoor child care programs would help to increase the child care capacity in the state of Oregon. Along with increasing capacity for child care options, this bill would support current child care providers who operate their programs outdoors to have more access to financial support, to be eligible for state funded programs and expand their operation hours to meet the needs of their communities. Under the current rules and regulations, many of these opportunities are inaccessible to outdoor programs due to licensing type and this creates difficulties in offering outdoor learning spaces to minority communities who could benefit from it the most and are already struggling to access green spaces. I believe that outdoor child care programs are a healthy opportunity and learning space that should be made more accessible to young children. This bill would be beneficial not only to the child care providers who operate this type of care gaining access to resources, but most importantly, it bridges the gap of supporting family well-being and each child's individual well-being through offering access to nature.

I see outdoor child care as a larger stepping-stone in the journey of bringing families and communities who are furthest away from support and services into the folds of our state systems. As child care providers are one of the most connected and influential aspects of a family's support system, I believe supporting providers in making these opportunities equitable and financially plausible as a huge step in meeting our community's deepest needs. Young children, of all abilities and backgrounds should have an opportunity to be in nature and experience the benefits of being outdoors. I testify in support of HB 2717.

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