

**2/26/23**

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 Charlotte Laguna and I am a licensed early childhood speech language pathologist in the state of Oregon. I am also the mother of a toddler and am familiar with the childcare options in my area. I reside in Multnomah county and Portland Or.

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 access and capacity for families!

Outdoor preschools offer unique physical, cognitive, and social developmental benefits which differ from opportunities in traditional indoor learning environments. I have experience working in preschools and daycares throughout the region and have observed the benefits outdoor education can have on children who are experiencing developmental challenges particularly in speaking and learning language. Additionally, I have often collaborated with other early childhood professionals such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, special education teachers and school staff while working with children. I have observed how easily treatment by early childhood professionals in an outdoor setting can incorporate sensory regulation activities beneficial for neurodivergent children whereas doing the same activities indoors can require extensive equipment and space to yield similar results. Furthermore, outdoor learning environments can be extremely helpful for children experiencing difficulty developing gross motor skills through the added opportunities for movement provided by natural terrain. Lastly, while working with children who are struggling to communicate, the outdoors can provide nearly limitless opportunities for language expression and vocabulary expansion with everyday things the children have the opportunity to actually see and experience outside.

Like most young families I know, we are still searching for the best childcare experience for my son and family and we would like to have access to outdoor education for him. We recognize the importance of House Bill 2717 for all families searching for good preschools in the area. While access to outdoor and nature-based experiences would clearly be beneficial for many students they are unfortunately limited in my area. Furthermore, children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and children facing developmental challenges, have even fewer opportunities to access these programs. Licensing outdoor preschools will increase capacity and create more equitable and accessible childcare options for all.

There are many reasons 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 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

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

Sincerely,

Charlotte Laguna MS, CCC-SLP

Portland, OR