

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 Julie Hackett and I am an educator and organic farmer who resides in Astoria, 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 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 taught an outdoor preschool class in California for many years, and witnessed the benefits of outdoor play for young children - many of which had been diagnosed with sensory processing disorders and struggled in a classroom. Outdoor physical play-based learning provides exactly what a young child needs to develop self-regulation, self-esteem and social skills.

Outdoor preschool does not only help children with dysregulation. Do you know that the act of sitting at a desk and holding a pencil requires core strength and highly tuned balance? A child who has not yet developed these physical skills will not thrive in a classroom. Climbing, running over uneven ground, building forts, and tumbling on grassy hills are not just idyllic childhood memories, they build the physical skills necessary for the simple act that we as adults take for granted, but is truly a high level of development: balancing in a chair and focusing on a task.

I now make Astoria, Oregon my home, and run a small organic farm that would be an ideal location for me to open an outdoor preschool and practice the skill I have dedicated many years of education and practice to attaining: a forest kindergarten teacher. It is my dream to offer outdoor preschool education to the families and children in my community, but current licensing rules prevent me from offering this needed service on the North Coast. Please vote in support of this bill.

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,

Julie Hackett

Julie Hackett
Astoria, Oregon