

Pennsylvania Chapter

INCORPORATED IN PENNSYLVANIA

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Pennsylvania Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights

Throughout the State of Pennsylvania and across the country, children are spending more time indoors—with many hours per day in front of screens—and less time playing and exploring the natural world around them. Meanwhile, the rates of childhood obesity, anxiety, and depression have all increased. We know that children who frequently spend time outside are less likely to experience obesity, attention and concentration disorders, and difficulties in school.

Furthermore, when children spend time outside and connect with their natural environments, they develop an appreciation for our natural resources, deepen their connections to the surrounding community, and build foundations for lifelong environmental stewardship.

Therefore, it is critically important to ensure that all Pennsylvania children can experience local nature and develop an appreciation for the State's natural resources and ecosystems. Connecting with outdoor environments will enhance the health and well-being of children across the State and will ensure that future generations continue to protect and promote our State's natural beauty. I encourage all parents, caregivers, educators, and youth leaders to join us in achieving this goal.

Therefore, we proclaim that all Pennsylvania children shall have the right and the opportunity to:

- Breathe clean air
- Play in safe, welcoming neighborhood parks and green spaces
- Learn about nature in classrooms, libraries, and schoolyards
- Explore the beauty of Pennsylvania's natural habitats
- Swim, splash, and fish in clean rivers, lakes, and ponds
- Plant seeds and harvest healthy produce from a garden or farm
- Compost and recycle to preserve their local environments
- Safely bike, ride, run, or hike on protected trails and lanes
- Access free or low-cost outdoor programs
- Gaze into a starry night sky

The Pennsylvania Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights is intended to serve as a guide to ensure that Pennsylvania children enjoy healthy, active lifestyles by spending time outdoors. Thus, all Pennsylvania children are entitled to:

Breathe clean air

Clean air is a basic necessity that children need in order to safely enjoy our state's beautiful environments. Air pollution has been shown to worsen kids' respiratory conditions like asthma and can negatively impact neurodevelopment. Thus, it is important that we prioritize clean air across the state.

Play in safe, welcoming neighborhood parks and green spaces

To experience the benefits of nature, children must be able to access and safely explore the parks and green spaces in their local communities. This means that all communities, regardless of geographic location, should strive to establish and protect local green spaces.

Learn about nature in classrooms, libraries, and schoolyards

Children spend a large amount of time in schools and other learning settings. These places should help children learn about the state's unique natural landscapes and resources. Green schoolyards can also provide safe, shaded spaces in which children can learn and play.

Explore the beauty of Pennsylvania's natural habitats

With snowy mountains, verdant river valleys, rolling hills, and dense forests, Pennsylvania is home to a diverse array of ecosystems. By exploring these natural landscapes, children can discover characteristic species like the eastern hemlock tree and the Pennsylvania firefly.

Swim, splash, and fish in clean rivers, lakes, and ponds

Through play and exploration, children can develop an appreciation for the life-giving value of water. By protecting our state's waters from pollution, we preserve natural resources and important ecosystems that are home to iconic species like bass, bluegill, and river otters.

Plant seeds and harvest healthy produce from a garden or farm

Children should have opportunities to earn dirty fingernails in local gardens or farms. Through planting, growing, and harvesting, children can nurture their own love for fresh, healthy foods and their understanding of food chains.

Compost and recycle to preserve their local environments

By learning and practicing waste diversion, children can foster a sense of purpose and belonging in conservation efforts. Composting and recycling help ensure that children of future generations will enjoy the same beautiful environments as the children of yesterday and today.

Safely bike, ride, run, or hike on protected trails and lanes

Dedicated trails and lanes enable children to play and exercise in outdoor environments, away from tablets, computers, and other screens. It is important to keep these pathways clean and safe so that children can discover new places and natural wonders during their adventures.

Access free or low-cost outdoor programs

All children benefit from affordable access to Pennsylvania's countless natural wonders and community leaders, who can share invaluable knowledge and expertise about local plants, animals, and resources. Outdoor programming can strengthen children's relationships with their environments, neighbors, and surrounding communities.

Gaze into a starry night sky

All children should feel the wonder and awe that comes with looking up into a dark, nighttime sky that is filled with stars. By minimizing light pollution and air pollution, we can ensure that children experience the excitement of seeing a shooting star or finding their favorite constellations.