



Testimony in Support of LD 1009, An Act Regarding the Reduction and Recycling of Food Waste

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Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Vanessa Berry. I am the Sustainable Maine Outreach Coordinator for the Natural Resources Council of Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1009.

Food waste is a growing concern in Maine, making up nearly 40 percent of our municipal waste stream that must be managed through our existing waste infrastructure. This heavy, wet, nutrient-rich material creates a unique challenge in landfills by generating a potent greenhouse gas in the form of methane, and food waste can also impact the efficiency of incineration when dumped into one of Maine's waste-to-energy facilities. According to Project Drawdown, reduced food waste and composting has the potential to prevent approximately 88 to 102 gigatons of CO₂ equivalent emissions globally, ranking among the top 5 strategies to mitigate climate change ([Drawdown](#)). Beyond the harm it can cause in the waste stream, discarded food is a waste of the time, land, water, and energy used to make food suitable for consumption in a state where one in four children is at risk for hunger ([Maine DOE](#)). Helping food waste generators donate their edible food and divert inedible food from disposal can have huge benefits for Maine's people and our environment.

At the local level, food waste diversion programs are a popular and successful strategy to reduce the amount of material being sent to landfills and waste-to-energy facilities. In Vermont, similar laws have been implemented to require food donation and diversion and have resulted in dramatic increases in food donations to food banks in the state. Here in Maine, dozens of municipalities have created kiosks for residential food waste collection or have implemented composting at their transfer facilities, and composting programs are expanding to school cafeterias and workplaces throughout the state. As the costs to dispose of waste in landfills and waste-to-energy facilities in Maine, municipalities, businesses, and individuals could see significantly lower disposal fees by removing food waste from the trash, in addition to possible incentives for donating food. Despite the municipal innovations already in place to reduce wasted food, more action is needed throughout the state to make food diversion accessible and convenient for all. This bill has the potential to create more long-term awareness of the volume of wasted food at all levels, and I have learned by auditing waste and digging through other people's garbage that once you have seen the volume of the problem, it is virtually impossible to un-see it.

As amended, LD 1009 provides a plan with concrete goals for implementation within a reasonable timeline. This bill also offers some flexibility when and if diversion is not accessible or presents a heavy financial burden in order to comply with the law. We acknowledge that not all Maine communities have the same access to convenient options for composting or anaerobic digestion of food waste and agree that implementation of food waste diversion requirements should not come at the cost of providing other essential services to the community. With the implementation of Maine's Extended-Producer Responsibility for Packaging law by 2027, municipalities participating in recycling will begin to see reimbursement payments that could be used to support

more collection and management of food waste, creating a positive feedback loop for increased residential recycling and food waste diversion.

LD 1009 presents a unique opportunity for Maine to keep food out of Maine's landfills and waste-to-energy facilities and redirect those resources to Maine people and Maine soil. This bill addresses food waste and food insecurity by establishing a clear pathway for businesses to donate surplus edible food to those in need and find productive uses for the remaining food that is unfit for human consumption. Food is simply too precious a resource to waste. Thank you for the opportunity to show our support, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.