

Maya Faulstich
Maine Youth Action
LD 2091

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Maya Faulstich, I am a resident of Yarmouth ME, and a student activist with Maine Youth Action. I am writing to support LD 2091, An Act to Allow the Reuse of Food Containers by More than One Customer.

When I buy a cup of tea, I'm given a paper cup with a plastic lid. Trees were cut to make this paper. Oil was extracted and chemicals were refined to make this plastic lid. Energy was used to transport this cup to the cafe where I sit and hold it. I drink out of this paper cup for three minutes and then throw it away. How do we live in a world where we waste valuable natural resources and energy for products we use for three minutes and then throw away? And we say "away", but where is "away"? In Maine, we burn our trash. The production and incineration of plastic alone produces more than 850 million metric tons of greenhouse gases. That's the same as the emissions from 189 five-hundred-megawatt coal power plants. We also landfill our trash, but we're not always going to have enough space for more and more landfills that release methane and carbon dioxide, contributing to climate change. Between 2018 and 2022, Maine's landfill waste increased by almost 50% (Maine EPA). In America, we're addicted to disposability. If it's out of sight, it's out of mind. But it comes back to bite us. On the roads, in the oceans, in the air, in our bodies, our trash is everywhere.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Reuse is our future. I took a trip to North Carolina, and when I went to a restaurant in Durham, they had this program called "Green to Go". There were reusable take-out boxes that you could just scan the code to check out, and then return them at any collection bin outside participating restaurants. They were washed and returned to restaurants to use again. It was a brilliant system, and it's not the only one that exists. Many other programs like it exist and thrive across the country. LD 2091 wouldn't force any restaurants to implement reuse, but it would make reuse optional, more accessible, and of course, subject to regulations. If a program like Green to Go were to start in Maine, it would be allowed to thrive under this bill, like it is in Durham.

I know some people are concerned about the safety of reuse. Is it sanitary? During the pandemic, the plastic industries capitalized on COVID-19 and scared the public into thinking that single-use plastic was the only answer for safety. However, the FDA has outlined safe practices for reuse, and reusable food packaging is already being used throughout the US and the world with no adverse health effects. With proper sanitation, reuse is totally safe, and most likely safer than single-use plastics. In fact, researchers from Columbia University and Rutgers University recently found around 240,000 detectable plastic fragments in a typical liter of bottled water. More and more, single-use plastic seems to be a very unsafe and unhealthy option. Do I really want my mouth on this lid? Now, I'm not so sure.

We have a growing sector of reuse businesses, like GoGoRefill, in Portland. Current policy would prohibit growth and lessen jobs in this sector. We have the opportunity right now to encourage Maine to work towards a circular economy. Recently, Maine passed an EPR for Packaging law and a modernized Bottle Bill law. Both of these laws have provisions and incentives for reuse. So let's stay consistent with other laws in Maine and continue to encourage the growth of reuse rather than prohibit it.

I'm a high schooler, and I'm concerned about growing up in a world stuffed to the brim with trash. As humans, are we really that careless, to throw away something that was made with pieces of our precious earth? It makes me sad. But reuse gives me hope. I am so excited to help shape a future that centralizes the reuse and recovery of materials, circulating them back into the economy rather than burning them or hiding them, for future generations to deal with. We are better than that. We can change the

systems we live in, we can make them healthier, and we can care for the preservation and full life cycle of materials we use.

For the growth of the new reuse economy, and for the preservation and improvement of the world we live in, I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 2091.

Sincerely,
Maya Faulstich