

Public Comment on LD2091 “An Act Regarding Businesses and Consumers Use of Returnable, Reusable, and Refillable Containers for Food, Beverages, and Nonfood Items”

January 22, 2024

Joint-Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
Cross Building, Room 214
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD2091: “An Act Regarding Businesses and Consumers Use of Returnable, Reusable, and Refillable Containers for Food, Beverages, and Nonfood Items.” My name is Erin Victor and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Maine in the Anthropology and Environmental Policy program where my research focuses on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies for packaging.

Prior to starting my doctorate program, I worked at the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) in the municipal solid waste reduction branch. There I led a statewide recycling education program, administered grants for reuse, refill, and repair, and spearheaded a strategic planning session for reuse. This is all to say that reducing waste, especially through promoting reusable systems is something I am strongly committed to – both on a professional and personal level.

Passing LD2091 is critical for meeting waste reduction goals in the state and aligns with the incentives for reuse set in the Maine EPR for packaging program and modernized bottle bill. In addition to helping meet waste reduction goals, LD2091 can also promote human health by allowing individual residents and businesses to switch from single use packaging made with toxic chemicals to safer, reusable and refillable packaging options.

Reuse Systems are Safe

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was concern over the use of reusable containers and bags amidst the uncertainty of how the virus spread. Responding to this fear, grocery stores temporarily lifted bag bans and coffee shops stopped accepting reusable mugs for refills. Upset by the misinformation and uptick in single-used plastics, 115 health experts released a statement¹ stressing that reusables systems can be completely safe. This is further supported by the guidance document² for the safe reuse of containers that policymakers are using to inform revisions to the FDA food code. Still, today businesses in Maine are unable to provide reusable containers to customers and residents are frequently told they cannot bring their own reusable containers to coffee shops and salad bars. Passing LD2091 aligns with the scientific evidence that reusable systems are safe and paves the way for more reuse and refill.

¹ June 22, 2022 Health Expert Statement “Health Expert Statement Addressing Safety of Reusables and COVID-19”: <https://storage.googleapis.com/planet4-international-stateless/2020/06/26618dd6-health-expert-statement-reusables-safety.pdf>

² Conference for Food Protection, 2020-2023, “Guidance Document for the Safe Reuse of Containers” <http://www.foodprotect.org/guides-documents/guidance-document-for-the-safe-reuse-of-containers/>

Benefits of reusable/refillable packaging over single use packaging

Single use packaging products are made with numerous chemical substances and additives, many of which are unregulated and have unknown health impacts. News headlines of the concerning public health impacts of some of these chemicals such as BPA and PFAS are now commonplace and concerning. For example, chemical additives commonly found in plastics (i.e. bisphenol A and phthalates) have been linked with cancer, infertility, and impaired neurodevelopment.³

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide comments. I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD2091.

Sincerely,

Erin Victor, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology and Environmental Policy, University of Maine, Orono

Please note that these comments reflect our my own views and expertise and do not speak on behalf of the university.

³ Halden, Rolf . “Plastics and Health Risks.” *Annual Review of Public Health* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 179–94. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.012809.103714>.