

Maya Faulstich
Maine Youth for Climate Justice
LD 231

Dear Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Honorable Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Maya Faulstich. I am a senior at Yarmouth High School and a member of Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ). I also served on the Materials Management Task Force for the Maine Climate Council. I am writing today on behalf of MYCJ to express our opposition to LD231, An Act to Update the Solid Waste Management Hierarchy.

If reduction and reuse are not options, the next best option is recycling. This is a well-known and well-studied fact. Incineration –burning trash– is a false solution to our solid waste problem.

Data from the EPA reports that in 2016, U.S. waste incinerators released the equivalent of 12 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and over half of those emissions came from plastic. Since then, we have only increased our incineration and our carbon emissions. Plastic is made from fossil fuels. When we incinerate our trash, we are burning fossil fuels.

In the waste management world, the ideal goal is a circular economy, where materials are reused, repaired, or recycled, and food waste is composted to grow new plants. But extracting fossil fuels to create plastic and burning it, no matter what the energy is used for, is linear. Burning waste can never be circular.

Plastic has been found in our placentas, lungs, breast milk, blood, and brains. Microplastics have been found everywhere they are searched for. Burning plastic releases dioxins, which cause cancer, reproductive and hormone issues, and immune damage. One study found 70-80% of dioxins in the far North come from waste incineration, and other research links proximity to incinerators with higher cancer rates and birth defects. This concerns me as I live near Portland, where Ecomaine burns non-recyclable waste. Am I breathing in what's being burned?

Even if none of what I have said resonates with you, please oppose this bill for consistency's sake. The US EPA ranks recycling and composting higher than “energy recovery” and incineration. All of the rest of New England does the same. Why should Maine not uphold the same standards?

Yes, we have too much waste. But if we really want to tackle our waste problem, we must prioritize policies that actually fix the problem and don't cause more harm than good. Policies like EPR for packaging, bans on certain single-use plastics, and organics recycling laws promote reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting. We cannot burn our way to a healthy world.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,
Maya Faulstich
Maine Youth for Climate Justice