

Testimony of Rene Augustus La Casse in Opposition of
LD 56: An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores and LD 69: An Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and honorable members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. I am Rene Augustus La Casse, and I am the Manager of Municipal Strategy and Policy Analyst at A Climate to Thrive. A Climate to Thrive is a community-driven non-profit that is working on a clean energy transition that prioritizes community benefits across Maine, with a particular focus on energy equity. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to oppose both **LD 56: An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores and LD 69: An Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags**.

LD 56: An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores seeks to ensure that single-use carry-out plastic bags are not subject to fees, whereas **LD 69: An Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags** seeks to entirely strike Title 38, Chapter 16, Section 1611 from Maine statute.

Context on our position on this issue goes back to 2019. On Mount Desert Island, a group of middle school students spearheaded an effort in all four island towns to reduce the use of single-use carry-out plastics by permitting the charge. This was quickly supported by citizens, leading to all four communities reducing their use of styrofoam containers and plastic bags by charging a small fee, or entirely forbidding their use. Our towns were among twenty in Maine that adopted such ordinances prior to the Maine Legislature passing **LD 1532: An Act To Eliminate Single-use Plastic Carry-out Bags**. Through broad public education around the ordinances and the impact of plastic on our environment, it was clear that a resounding consensus existed that plastic has a detrimental effect on our natural environment. Additionally, citizens organizing through the Citizens Initiative for Reducing Plastics on MDI used their activism to push for reduced prices on reusable bags through the fees accumulated from plastic and paper bag sales, creating a motivation for these fees and increasing the accessibility of reusable bags.

LD 56: An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores and LD 69: An Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags are both misguided pleas for (perceived) convenience that disregard the facts and dismiss priorities that Maine towns, like ours, still hold today. Plastic never fully degrades, creating toxic microplastics that harm our waters and soil, and by extension, the health of Mainers. It is also true that the idea of recycling single-use plastic bags is ineffective, resulting in little benefit for the trouble undertaken.

Finally, these bills ignore the risks of microplastics and therefore run in direct opposition to the progress that our state has made in protecting our environment and citizens from perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). These are also forms of microplastics, and can be found in single-use plastics like plastic bags. When the State of Maine's Department of Environmental Protection began testing high school wells across the state for PFAS, Mount Desert Island High School tested among the highest in the state for concentration of PFAS in its water. As well, testing in the Town of Tremont and mainland Trenton demonstrated that numerous wells registered PFAS levels over the acknowledged threshold. With this, it is clear our towns take the intrusion of plastics in our waters and soils very seriously and view both efforts to change Maine's plastic reduction efforts as regressive and environmentally damaging. For these reasons, A Climate to Thrive urges this committee to oppose both **LD 56: An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores** and **LD 69: An Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags**.