

LD 297 Testimony in Opposition

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

This is a Bad Bill. The title indicates a lack of understanding of basic waste facts: “Oversized Bulky Waste” (OBW) does not come from Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTPs). This legislation is an attempt to undo legislation that protected Maine from becoming New England’s dumping ground. In 1989 Maine legislators passed laws restricting future landfills in Maine to be publicly owned or to serve the needs of a specific exclusive entity such as a paper mill.

Maine’s only functioning state landfill, Juniper Ridge Landfill (JRL) is in Old Town less than two miles from my house. It was obtained from a paper mill by the State with promises that there would be no Out of State waste allowed into JRL. Since JRL’s beginning in 2003 and its Operating Services Agreement (OSA) was signed in early 2004, the Operator, Casella Waste Systems, has done everything in its power to fill JRL with waste from its customers and transfer stations across New England and beyond.

They have achieved this goal primarily by changing the definition of what Maine Waste is. Unlike Maine Lobster, or Maine Potatoes, the definition of Maine Waste is over five pages long and would get longer with this Bill’s passage. This complication would make it even more difficult to ascertain the actual origins of the waste coming to JRL, and impossible to assess compliance with our Maine Waste Hierarchy.

Several years ago Casella and their allies sprung a “sludge crisis” on Maine legislators, that resulted in a special exception allowing 25,000 tons per year of out of state OBW into Maine. That privileged loophole closes in a couple of months. This should have given Casella plenty of time to deal with the increased amounts of WWTP sludge coming to JRL.

LD 297 would perpetuate a Myth: that OBW is a good stabilizer of sludge. Aside from Casella and perhaps some in the DEP, there is no waste industry consensus that OBW is the solution to any stability problem. During the so-called “crisis” of 2023, DEP worked diligently to provide other sources of stabilizers, but somehow Casella rejected all of these, claiming that their OBW sourced from their network across the northeastern United States was the best and only viable option. It is certainly the most profitable for Casella.

Other interesting OBW facts include that according to a study funded by Casella, OBW has the highest % of PFAS compounds of any waste material! So to solve the “sludge crisis” which occurred in response to banning the spreading of WWTP sludges on Maine farmlands, Casella wants to bring in more PFAS! In addition they claim that residue from processing OBW makes ideal Daily Cover at JRL. This Daily Cover makes

up about one-sixth of the total volume, and Daily Cover material pays no tip fees to Old Town or Alton. So the people of Massachusetts get rid of their OBW and other wastes, Maine loses its precious landfill capacity, and the host Community gets no compensation.

In summary, there is no sludge crisis. Casella spread sludge on thousands of acres of Maine farmland and that poisoned soil could serve to stabilize sludge at JRL, as well as serve as landfill cover. Dewatering of sewage sludges needs to be pursued and facilities reoriented to prepare for the future. This Bill is a step backward and should be voted Not to Pass.

Regards,

Ed Spencer