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## Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine in support of LD 2141, An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund, the Maine Working Farmland Access

February 4, 2026

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

Before I joined GrowSmart in 2010, I served in this Legislature for eight years. I was appointed to the Business, Research and Economic Development Committee all four terms; three of them as House Chair. In that time, “the bottle bill” came up each and every session. I am well-versed in the purpose and history of this process. I’ve reviewed proposals to change the bottle bill in the sixteen years since I served in the Legislature, and this proposal is the first with a direct connection to GrowSmart’s mission and our work.

GrowSmart Maine is a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for smart growth policies and investments, share in thought leadership, host convenings, and provide technical assistance toward smart growth practices and outcomes. All this to ensure Maine communities are places where people feel safe, that they belong, and they can thrive. Where we decide to direct development and where we decide to protect land from development has that kind of impact on Maine people.

Since its inception in the late 1970’s, the bottle bill has been a successful mechanism to protect our environment, reduce municipal costs, and improve Maine’s extraordinary quality of life.

Regulation of unclaimed deposits on beverage containers has evolved since then, with the option for “comingling” to improve efficiency for manufacturers, and broadening its scope to include additional containers found along roadsides. Redemption rates are high; measured at 77% as recently as 2023; much higher than our recycling rates for similar materials.

This bill recognizes that, even with this high return rate, millions of dollars are unclaimed by consumers every year; money that stays with the manufacturers.

This bill also recognizes the original environmental intent of the bottle bill:

**It redirects a small portion of “the float,” those unredeemed deposits, to provide ongoing funding to proven state programs for two of Maine’s most significant environmental and economic assets; lakes and farmland.**

As amended, this bill would allocate a portion of that amount, totaling \$4 million, leaving over \$10,000,000 retained by manufacturers each year.

As the administration and legislature focus on removing barriers to housing where it makes sense in the long term, **this bill represents a smart investment of bottle deposits left behind by consumers to protect Maine’s prime farmland and shorelands.**