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**Testimony in Support of LD 474
An Act to Establish a Stewardship Program for Primary and Rechargeable Batteries**

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Carrie Kipfer, and I serve as the County Administrator for Lincoln County and oversee operations at Lincoln County Recycling in Wiscasset. I am writing in strong support of **LD 474, An Act to Establish a Stewardship Program for Primary and Rechargeable Batteries**.

From the perspective of a county-run recycling facility, battery waste is no longer a minor issue — it is one of the fastest-growing operational and safety challenges our municipalities face.

Increasing Safety Risks

Over the past several years, there has been a sharp increase in discarded batteries entering the waste stream. These batteries are commonly found in cell phones, power tools, vapes, laptops, toys, and small appliances. When improperly disposed of in household trash or recycling systems, they can be punctured or crushed during processing.

The result is thermal runaway — spontaneous ignition that can quickly escalate into serious fires.

Even one battery can shut down a facility, endanger employees, damage equipment, and disrupt services for municipalities. Across the country, fires linked to lithium-ion batteries have caused millions of dollars in damage at transfer stations and recycling facilities. While staff work diligently to educate the public and remove batteries when possible, they cannot reasonably intercept them all.

Municipal Cost Burdens

The financial and safety burden of overseeing this unmanaged risk at transfer stations currently falls on local government and property taxpayers.

It is neither sustainable nor equitable for local governments to absorb the growing costs associated with products that are designed, marketed, and distributed by manufacturers without a funded end-of-life management system.

Complementing Maine's EPR Law

LD 474 would complement and strengthen Maine's broader Extended Producer Responsibility framework established under Maine Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging Law.

That law recognized an important principle: producers should share responsibility for managing the end-of-life impacts of the materials they introduce into the marketplace. A battery stewardship program follows the same logic. It ensures that hazardous and high-risk materials are addressed directly, rather than left to municipal systems that were never designed to safely manage them at scale.

By aligning battery management with Maine's existing EPR approach, LD 474 builds consistency into our waste policy, reinforces producer accountability, and closes a significant gap in our current system.

Why Producer Stewardship Is the Right Approach

LD 474 would establish a producer-funded stewardship program to create a safe, convenient, and consistent statewide system for battery collection and recycling. It would create a system to encourage proper recycling of these materials and give consumers an opportunity to dispose of them in a responsible manner.

From an operational standpoint, this is critical.

Producers are in the best position to:

- Finance collection and recycling systems
- Design products with end-of-life management in mind
- Standardize labeling and consumer education
- Ensure proper processing of hazardous and valuable materials

A well-designed stewardship program would reduce the number of batteries entering recycling facilities and the waste stream, directly lowering fire risks at processing facilities like ours. It would also relieve municipalities of the financial responsibility for managing these increasingly complex products.

Protecting Workers and Infrastructure

Our employees work hard every day to safely process recyclables for Lincoln County communities. They should not have to face preventable fire hazards caused by improperly discarded products.

Equipment damage from battery fires can halt operations, affect public service delivery, and result in costly repairs. A statewide stewardship system would be a proactive measure to protect both public infrastructure and the workers who operate it.

Conclusion

From the standpoint of Lincoln County Recycling and the communities we serve, LD 474 is a necessary and practical step forward.

It improves public safety.

It reduces financial strain on municipalities.

It reinforces Maine's EPR framework and producer responsibility principles.

And it reflects Maine's longstanding commitment to smart, accountable waste policy.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 474.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully submitted,
Carrie Kipfer
County Administrator
Lincoln County, Maine