



ESTABLISHED 1975

February 25, 2026

Senator Denise Tepler, Chair
Representative Victoria Doudera, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

RE: Letter in Support of LD 474, An Act to Improve Maine's Environment and Protect Natural Resources

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

For the past 20 years, I have served as the General Manager of the Juniper Ridge Landfill (JRL). JRL is owned by the State of Maine and Casella operates the landfill on behalf of the State pursuant to the Operating Services Agreement that will expire in 2034. Casella also operates eight other landfills, and dozens of recycling, transfer, and hauling facilities throughout the Eastern United States.

Lithium-ion batteries are found in many of the devices we use every day. They serve an important purpose, but they can be very dangerous when disposed of in regular trash or recycling bins. Lithium-ion batteries catch fire primarily due to a rapid chain reaction, known as thermal runaway, which is often triggered by physical damage. The battery temperature rises quickly, often reaching over 700 degrees Fahrenheit in milliseconds, causing a chemical reaction, and resulting in the energy stored in that battery being released very suddenly. The catastrophic consequences of batteries being placed in household trash or recycling have resulted in fires and tragic loss of life across the country. Fires can occur when the batteries are collected by waste and recycling trucks and compacted, causing the batteries to combust in the truck, or they make it to their destination, and combust either in the recycling facility, transfer station, or landfill.

The National Waste and Recycling Association estimates that more than 5,000 fires occur annually at recycling facilities in North America, many of which are linked to improper battery disposal. These fires cause millions of dollars in property damage, disrupt waste services, and pose significant health and safety risks to waste workers and emergency responders.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has directed that lithium batteries or battery -containing devices be managed as hazardous waste. They should never be placed in household trash or curbside recycling bins. Regrettably, improper disposal continues despite the best efforts of the DEP and municipal waste officials.

In May 2023, there was a fire at JRL, and we are reasonably sure based on the applicable conditions at the time that it was caused by a lithium battery. We were fortunate that it was a relatively manageable fire and that the courageous men and women from the Old Town, Alton, Bradley and Hudson Fire Departments were able to get it under control quickly and safely. We were able to resume normal operations the next day, and most importantly no one was harmed.

In light of these safety concerns, we support LD 474 and its objectives. We believe that more must be done to prevent improper disposal of lithium-ion batteries. Among the challenges Casella faces in managing JRL, ensuring proper operation of the facility, preserving the surrounding environment and protecting the safety of the people in surrounding area, the improper disposal of lithium-ion batteries is among our greatest concerns.

We do not claim to know whether the specific extended producer responsibility program outlined in this bill is the best approach. We recognize that establishing a new, independent collection network would impose additional costs on the regulated community. There may be advantages to combining this collection program with Maine's existing programs for batteries or electronics. Similarly, the breadth of the extended producer responsibility program currently being implemented and put out to bid by the DEP should provide us with more information about efficient and effective collection models.

Consistent with stewardship legislation adopted or proposed in other states, we also encourage consideration of appropriate protections for solid waste facility owners, operators, and collectors when covered batteries are inadvertently received despite good-faith compliance with disposal bans and public education requirements. These protections recognize the operational realities of waste management while reinforcing shared responsibility for proper battery disposal.

Sincerely,



Wayne Boyd
General Manager
Juniper Ridge Landfill