



Allison Hepler

417 Montsweag Rd.

Woolwich, ME 04579

Phone: (207) 319-4396

Allison.Hepler@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler In Support Of
LD 134, An Act to Increase the Handling Fee for Beverage Containers Reimbursed to Dealers and Redemption Centers
before the Joint Standing Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources

Good morning, Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Allison Hepler, and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **LD 134, An Act to Increase the Handling Fee for Beverage Containers Reimbursed to Dealers and Redemption Centers**, as amended.

I'll be brief. I live in an area where, last summer, we lost four redemption centers within 15 miles and across 3 counties. Currently, one is only open to a few select non-profit organizations who redeem their bottles, and one remains open until the place is overrun with bottles, which is often, and then he closes.

Quite honestly, they could not keep up with increased costs – of rent, utilities, materials and labor. Redemption centers are paid a handling fee by distributors and manufacturers, the so-called “initiators of deposit.” The fee is per container and it is set in statute, currently 4 ½ cents. This makes it impossible for redemption centers to pay workers a rate at which they can retain them and also pay rent, utilities and other costs. Redemption center owners who are here today will tell you better than I ever can what they face in running these valuable small businesses.

Tying the handling fee to a cost of living figure provides an element of predictability for the redemption center owners and also for the distributors and manufacturers.

A handling fee increase, however, is not enough. We also need to modernize the entire system, to achieve efficiencies, to develop convenience for consumers and to support our small businesses. Fortunately, there's a modernization plan that many of us have been working on for months.

As all of us know, redemption centers play an important part in our communities and are vital to the success of our bottle redemption law. Not only do they redeem our bottles but they also support a large number of non-profit organizations that rely on donations that come from redeemed containers. They will tell you that this morning.

Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to answer your questions.