



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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**Testimony in Support of LD 1418,
An Act Concerning Single-use Disposable Water Bottles and Water Refill Stations
Sarah Nichols, NRCM Sustainable Maine Director, May 3, 2023**

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Sarah Nichols, and I am the Sustainable Maine Director for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) I am here to offer our support for LD 1418

For nearly 10 years my job at NRCM has been to advocate for practical, meaningful policies that support Maine's solid waste management hierarchy and protect people from the harmful and costly waste issues created by profit-driven corporations. Promoting the use of free water refill stations as an alternative to single-use bottled water is a remarkably clear and simple way to eliminate unnecessary waste and support a more sustainable culture and environment. We support the thoughtful approach in LD 1418 to have the State lead by example by only offering free drinking water to guests of State buildings and events and eventually requiring water refilling stations where single-use water bottles are sold throughout the state.

Bottled water didn't gain widespread popularity until the 1970s when the first single-use plastic bottles became available and reduced the cost and shipping of drinking water to consumers, but it wasn't until the late 1990s that sales really surged. Big soda companies were losing money as people opted for healthier beverages, like water. To capitalize on that movement, soda companies launched sales campaigns against tap water, and seduced consumers into buying their bottled water as a healthy alternative. The sales and marketing tactics of these corporations were very effective at manufacturing demand for their product, and now bottled water is a social norm and is the most popular packaged beverage in the US.¹

There is nothing inherently wrong with offering healthier beverages to consumers. The problem is the immense amount of pollution and waste created by the manufacture, shipment, and disposal of the more than 70 billion plastic water bottles that are purchased each year in the US.² In emergencies or instances where there is no or limited access to clean drinking water, bottled water makes a lot of sense. But since most tap water is just as safe or safer than bottled water,³

¹ Data according to the Beverage Marketing Corporation <https://bottledwater.org/bottled-water-consumption-shift/>

² Data according to the Container Recycling Institute <https://www.container-recycling.org/index.php/issues/bottled-water>

³ From The Story of Stuff https://www.storyofstuff.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SoBottledWater_Annotated_Script.pdf "Municipal water in the US is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency, which does frequent testing, as do local authorities. The federal Safe Drinking Water Act empowers EPA to require water testing by certified laboratories and that violations be reported within a specified time frame. Public water systems must also provide reports to customers about their water, noting its source, evidence of contaminants and compliance with regulations. The Food and Drug Administration, on the other hand, regulates bottled water as a food and cannot require certified lab testing or violation reporting. FDA

and about 2,000 times cheaper,⁴ we believe that offering more water refill stations is the best thing for our health and our environment and is why we support LD 1418

I've also been working with Representative Allison Hepler on a bill to modernize our Bottle Bill program. Over the past six months we've visited many redemption centers, and I've been consistently blown away by the volume of single-use water bottles. Sorted into dozens of different containers no less since there are so many different brand labels. On these visits I've also been reminded about how grateful I am to our redemption centers for collecting all of these containers for recycling and keeping them out of environment and out of our taxpayer-funded municipal waste stream.

Maine's lawmakers have done a great job in getting these containers collected for recycling, but the next steps up on the hierarchy are reuse and reduce—this bill provides the perfect launching pad for that effort. And, if the Committee would like to find some funding for water refill stations, one place to look could be the estimated \$16.7 million in unclaimed deposits from the Bottle Bill program that you all will be discussing soon.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these comments. I look forward to supporting the Committee in its work to advance LD 1418.

monitors the labeling of bottled water, but the bottlers themselves are responsible for testing – kind of like the fox guarding the henhouse. Furthermore, FDA doesn't require bottled water companies to disclose where the water came from, how it was treated or what contaminants it contains. For a good article on the topic, see The New York Times, "Fewer Regulations for Bottled Water Than Tap, GAO Says," at <http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2009/07/09/09greenwire-fewer-regulations-for-bottled-water>

⁴ Data according to The Story of Stuff https://www.storyofstuff.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SoBottledWater_Annotated_Script.pdf