



**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES
May 3, 2023**

In opposition to LD 1418, An Act Concerning Single-use Disposable Water Bottles and Water Refill Stations

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and honorable members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for your service to the people of Maine. My name is Liz Donohue, and I am the Director of Government Relations at BlueTriton Brands, owner of Maine's iconic Poland Spring® brand. We take tremendous pride in the Poland Spring® brand, the hard work of our 900 Maine employees at our Hollis, Kingfield and Poland facilities, and in our springs. We sustainably source our water and conserve more than 6000 acres of land surrounding our 10 spring sites. In 2022 we donated 1 million bottles of water and \$1 million to community and educational organizations in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to LD 1418. We applaud your leadership on packaging sustainability and your prioritization of recycling policy. Specifically, we thank you for the passage last year of Rep. Doudera's legislation to require the inclusion of post-consumer recycled content in our products which helps foster an improved market for recycled materials. In fact, we support other states following in Maine's footsteps to adopt the same or similar legislation.

BlueTriton Brands is an industry leader in packaging sustainability. The Poland Spring Brand® has led the industry in source reduction initiatives, recyclability design, consumer education, and material innovations including the use of recycled content over its long history. We are committed to reducing our waste footprint, keeping plastic out of landfills, and off beaches and hiking trails. In 2022, approximately 24% of our total portfolio was made from recycled plastic. This winter BlueTriton rolled out 100% recycled plastic 700mL and 1L bottles – not an easy feat given the high demand for recycled plastic into downcycled items.

We want to foster a strong circular economy where bottles are recycled directly into bottles and strive to raise the recycled content in our portfolio. To that end we have a commitment that 100% of our products will be in packaging that is either reusable or made from an average of 35% recycled materials by 2025.

LD 1418 is not about recycled plastic or recycling. Instead, it proposes to use policy as a tool to change behavior both for the manufacturer and for the consumer through an effective prohibition on the convenient sale of single use plastic water bottles in retail locations. We appreciate the underlying intent of the proposal is to reduce plastic in our environment – that is our goal as well.

Let me assure you that we are exploring bioplastics and compostable options and engaging with our supply chain. There remain a lot of questions and plenty of testing of materials and process adaptation that will take time and capital. Nonetheless, bioplastics is being pursued.





Until bioplastics or compostable materials can be efficiently used in the manufacturing process, PET water bottles offer the lowest environmental footprint of any packaged beverage with the lowest fossil fuel use, lowest emissions and lowest water use to be produced. Non-carbonated water can be safely packaged in super lightweight bottles that use significantly less plastic than is required by carbonated beverages. Poland Spring has reduced the amount of plastic in our half-liter bottles by over 60%, saving approximately 65 million pounds of plastic annually.

In addition, PET water bottles are the most recycled beverage container. Bottled water containers make up nearly 55 percent of the PET plastic collected in curbside systems. In comparison, soft drink PET bottles make up only 15 percent. According to the Consumer Recycling Institute, the Beverage Marketing Corporation and the National Association for PET Containers Resources, of the bottles that end up in landfills only 3.3% are PET bottled water compared to 13.3% PET soda bottles.

A prohibition on the sale of plastic water bottles will not reduce overall waste especially in Maine, which has such a successful bottle return system. On the other hand, this proposal will be detrimental to the health and well-being of communities. This gets to the proposal's unintended negative impact on consumers.

Water is increasingly the drink of choice – particularly on-the-go. I think we can all agree that this is good news from a health perspective. Choosing water as a primary beverage means millions of avoided calories from sugary drinks and a reduction in the associated health risks. At a time when 70% of beverages are consumed away from home, eliminating access to bottled water means limiting people's ability to make healthy choices on-the-go.

Research shows that bottled water bans lead to increased consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. A study by the American Journal of Public Health (2015) confirmed that bans or restrictions on the sale of bottled water can lead to increased consumption of less healthy beverages. The study cites a specific example in Vermont, where a similar ban resulted in a 33% increase in the consumption of sugary drinks. In a case study of Sudbury, MA's ban on the bottled water sales, consumption of sport drinks, soft drinks and ready to drink ice teas increased while at other New England retail and convenience store locations sugar-sweetened beverage sales declined.

A lot of work has been done in recent years to foster behavior change in consumers to make healthy choices. Taking away a convenient healthy choice undoes that effort. The consumer choice is not to buy a \$30 refillable water bottle because you accidentally left yours at home while trying to get your toddler out of the house, it is to buy comparably affordable convenient beverage to bottled water.

While well-intentioned, this proposal will not improve our current health challenges, nor put a dent in reducing landfill waste. It will however distract from the sound recycling policies previously championed by this committee and prevent investment in environmentally-healthier alternatives.

We are eager to work with the Committee to brainstorm policies that could foster a practical transition as material innovations come to the forefront.

Thank you



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900 LONG RIDGE ROAD, BLDG 2 STAMFORD, CT 06902-1138
109 POLAND SPRING DRIVE, POLAND, ME 04274