



# Natural Resources Council of Maine

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## Testimony in Support of LD 2091

### **An Act Regarding Businesses' and Consumers' Use of Returnable, Reusable and Refillable Containers for Food, Beverages, and Nonfood Items**

*Vanessa Berry, NRCM Sustainable Maine Outreach Coordinator, January 22, 2023*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Vanessa Berry, and I am the Sustainable Maine Outreach Coordinator for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I am here to testify in support for LD 2091, which would help businesses reduce waste from packaging through the utilization of returnable, reusable, and refillable containers – options that Maine businesses and Maine people increasingly support.

For decades, Maine has been a national leader in adopting practical solid waste policy solutions that save money for Maine taxpayers while reducing the environmental impacts of the waste. However, consumers are becoming increasingly frustrated with the wasteful packaging they receive. They are eager to support businesses that provide safe, reusable options for their packaging needs, and businesses are ready to respond to this market opportunity. But Maine currently lags other states, and even the Federal government, in our policies and guidance on reusable packaging.

Reuse is much more than filling a mason jar at a bulk bin in a grocery store. Reusable food and beverage packaging options for event venues, in-house dining, retail, and take-out services are popping up throughout the country. Many businesses provide reusable, returnable container programs because it saves them money and provides a better dining experience for their customers. Innovative third-party businesses also are being created to support the logistics and sanitation for businesses that provide reusable and returnable containers.

This emerging business sector that reduces waste and plastic pollution could provide many jobs and satisfy strong consumer interest, but our policies need to catch up with the opportunities. Specifically, the current statute that informs the State of Maine Health Inspection Program Refilling Returnables Policy and guidance is preventing businesses from adopting these strategies in Maine. LD 2091 is designed to modernize our policies to meet market demands for reusable containers.

In addition to supporting reuse businesses and forward-thinking entrepreneurs, this bill could help reduce taxpayer costs for municipal waste disposal. In Maine, all waste from food and takeout packaging ends up in the municipal waste stream. Packaging disposal and management in Maine is estimated to cost property taxpayers at least \$16 million a year.<sup>1</sup> It doesn't have to be this way. Businesses that provide reusable containers are part of the solution to the high costs of managing packaging waste.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Maine Department of Environmental Protection's 2019 Annual Product Stewardship Report

Passage of LD 2091 will help provide a safe transition to reusable packaging for a broad range of businesses, which will save money for those businesses, reduce taxpayer burdens, and reduce waste.

LD 2091 simply amends existing law to include all manner of reuse options. Making this change is critical to support businesses, such as ones testifying today, that are seeking to provide this service in response to consumer interests.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2091.