

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Vice President of Programs and Policy, Defend Our Health
In Support of LD 2091 "An Act Regarding Businesses' and Consumers' Use of Returnable,
Reusable and Refillable Containers for Food, Beverages and Nonfood Items"
Before the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry committee
January 22, 2024

Hello Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the Vice President for Programs and Policy at Defend Our Health. Defend Our Health's mission is to make sure that everyone has equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes, and products that are toxic-free and climate friendly. I am here to testify in support of LD 2091 "An Act Regarding Businesses' and Consumers' Use of Returnable, Reusable and Refillable Containers for Food, Beverages and Nonfood Items".

The issue of waste and plastic waste in particular is something we should all be concerned about. In Maine, we are dependent on the ocean for our way of life. Whether it be tourism dollars or our fishing industry, the state is dependent on the ocean. Plastic makes up 85% of marine litter¹. We have all been walking and seen plastic bottles or food containers that have been left behind, littering our beautiful trails and beaches. This is a huge concern from both an environmental and economic perspective. Millions flock to our state every year to enjoy our Maine's pristine outdoor spaces. Lobstermen and fishermen work hard to provide fresh seafood for our communities. The fishing industry contributes about 3.2 billion dollars to Maine's economy² and the tourism industry contributes around 8.6 billion dollars³. Plastic waste ending up in our oceans and on our beaches harms these vital industries. Reusable can help lessen this plastic waste.

Most importantly, the health impacts of plastic are staggering. A new study⁴ that Defend worked on with a research team from New York University shows that health impacts from the toxics in plastics lead to \$250 billion dollars in healthcare costs in the U.S. This includes things like 121,000 cases of male infertility from BBP and DBP, two phthalates, costing \$3.1 billion. 118,000 cases of childhood obesity from PFOA, a PFAS, costing \$2.5 billion. 59,100 cases of endometriosis in women from DEHP, a phthalate, and 50,000 early deaths. We cannot continue to rely on single use plastics. We are literally killing ourselves with our use of single-use plastics.

1 United Nations. (n.d.). *Fast facts - what is plastic pollution? - United Nations Sustainable Development*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2023/08/explainer-what-is-plastic-pollution/>

2 University of Southern Maine and Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey . (2023, January). *The Economic Impacts of the Maine Seafood Sector*. SeaMaine. https://cbe.miis.edu/context/noep_publications/article/1020/viewcontent/FINAL_SEAMaine_Economic_Impact_Analysis_Report_2023_01_24.pdf

3 Schreiber, L. (2023, March 28). *Tourists spent \$8.6B in Maine last year, supporting 151,000 Jobs*. Mainebiz. <https://www.mainebiz.biz/article/tourists-spent-86b-in-maine-last-year-supporting-151000-jobs>

4 Trasande, L., Krithivasan, R., Park, K., Obsekov, V., & Belliveau, M. (2024). Chemicals used in plastic materials: An estimate of the attributable disease burden and costs in the United States. *Journal of the Endocrine Society*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.1210/jendso/bvad163>



We can help make a difference when it comes to the impacts that plastic production and plastic waste have on our communities. Reusables are a step in the right direction. Reusables are already being used throughout the United States and the world. They are completely safe with proper sanitation. The FDA is in the process of updating the food code with guidance on the safe use of reusables⁵. There are countries in the EU such as France, Germany, and Portugal that have systems in place for reusables.

Maine has taken several strides in the past few years to reduce sources of waste. Our current policy on reusables is in opposition to our waste reduction policies. Maine passed a revolutionary extended producer responsibility law back in 2021 and just last session updated the bottle bill. Both have provisions and incentives that encourage businesses to embrace reuse, but the current law and guidance will prohibit Maine from using these laws to facilitate more reuse for food packaging in the State. We need to update our laws.

To protect the health and environment of all Mainers we must move towards more reusable containers. Therefore, Defend urges you to unanimously vote “ought to pass” on LD 2091.

Thank you.

⁵ Conference for Food Protection. (n.d.). *Guidance document for the safe reuse of containers: Conference-developed guides and documents*. Conference for Food Protection. <http://www.foodprotect.org/guides-documents/guidance-document-for-the-safe-reuse-of-containers/>