



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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Testimony Neither for Nor Against LD 479, An Act to Facilitate Expansion of the State's Recycling Efforts Under the Beverage Container Redemption Program

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March 17, 2025*

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Vanessa Berry. I serve as the Sustainable Maine Program Manager for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on LD 479, which explores the potential expansion of Maine's Returnable Beverage Container Program. I am testifying Neither For Nor Against this bill.

Maine's Returnable Beverage Container Program, commonly known as the Bottle Bill, has been one of the state's most effective product stewardship initiatives, maintaining a recycling rate of more than 75% for covered containers. NRCM has been a strong advocate for this program since its inception and has actively worked to enhance its efficiency and long-term sustainability. Our organization was also engaged in the most recent legislative amendments to the Bottle Bill passed during the 131st Legislature. This program plays a vital role in creating local jobs, recovering beverage containers, and reducing litter—making it a well-utilized and valued system among Maine residents.

NRCM supports the overall concept of LD 479, which proposes allowing redemption centers to collect additional types of packaging materials and expand recycling activities within this framework. However, we have concerns regarding the timing of such an expansion. The Department of Environmental Protection currently is conducting a rulemaking to implement changes to the Bottle Bill enacted in the 131st Legislature. At a time when these changes to the Bottle Bill are in the process of being put into place, passage of LD 479 could introduce additional complexities for redemption centers as they adapt to these modifications. Additionally, Maine is in the process of implementing a Stewardship Program for Packaging law, which may create alternative recycling pathways for some of the materials referenced in this proposal. Waiting until the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging program is in place seems prudent, before additional changes, such as in LD 479, are made.

We recognize that numerous materials could be well-suited for inclusion in Maine's Bottle Bill, including certain beverage containers currently exempted from the program. Expanding the Bottle Bill to cover additional packaging types could help secure stable end markets and improve recycling rates. However, it is equally important to recognize that such an expansion could also lead to increased operational costs for redemption centers and material processors, including those related to storage, collection, sorting, and cleaning. If the Committee decides to move forward with this proposal, a thorough evaluation of the financial implications and feasibility of

adding new material types would be beneficial to ensure both environmental and economic viability.

Expanding Maine's Returnable Beverage Container Program presents a promising opportunity to enhance recycling efforts, but careful planning and strong stakeholder engagement should be part of any such process. Redemption center operators, who would be responsible for sorting and managing these additional materials, must be involved in discussions to ensure that all implementation issues are carefully evaluated and addressed. We welcome any questions the Committee may have and look forward to continued collaboration with material managers, producers, and other stakeholders throughout this process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.