



Solutions for a
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, Defend Our Health
In Opposition of LD 56 "An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores, LD 69 "An
Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags" and in
support of LD 1122 "An Act to Amend the Law Banning Single-use Carry-out Bags".

Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee

March 26, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the Vice President of Policy and Advocacy for 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 opposition of LD 56 "An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores, LD 69 "An Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags" and in support of LD 1122 "An Act to Amend the Law Banning Single-use Carry-out Bags".

When the 129th legislature passed LD 1532, banning single-use plastic bags, it did so with overwhelming public support along with support from industries that were impacted by this law. Environmental groups worked with the hospitality and grocery store industries to pass a common-sense law with bipartisan support. The reasons for the passage of this law haven't changed. Plastics still pollute our environment. We have all seen the photos of plastics, including plastic bags, washing up on our shores. By 2050, ton for ton there will be more plastics than fish in the ocean. Countless whales, sea turtles, and birds suffer slow, painful deaths and injuries from plastic bag pollution when they mistake the bags for food or get entangled. This is even more concerning for Maine because so much of our way of life depends upon the ocean.

Not only do plastic bags continue to harm our environment and kill our wildlife, there is also increasing evidence that the use of plastics are causing harm to human health as well. Fish and other marine life ingest these plastics and then we, in turn, ingest them. However, studying these health effects is challenging. Scientists "remain concerned about the human-health impacts of marine plastics because, again, they are ubiquitous and they eventually will degrade and fragment into nanoplastics, which measure less than 100 billionths of a meter—in other words, they are invisible. Alarmingly these tiny plastics can penetrate cells and move into tissues and organs. But because researchers lack analytical methods to identify nanoplastics in food, they don't have any data on their occurrence or absorption by humans."¹ Moreover, research has shown that even seemingly benign plastics like high-density polyethylene (HDPE)

¹ Royte E. We Know Plastic is Harming Marine Life. What About Us? National Geographic 2018
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/06/plastic-planet-health-pollution-waste-microplastics/>



can break down in the environment to leach estrogenic chemicals that can be harmful to both fetuses and young children.²

It isn't only the products themselves that can harm human health, but the production of these plastics, including plastic bags. A report by the Center for International Environmental Law highlights the human health effects throughout the life cycle of the product. From the air and water pollution due to fossil fuels used in the production of these products to the harmful chemicals that can leach into soil, water, and the human body from the products themselves, the potential for human harm is present over the lifespan of these products.³ For these and many other reasons, we need to keep the plastic bag ban in place and keep in place the 5 cent fee to incentivize utilizing reusable bags.

LD 1122 would close a loophole in the current plastic bag ban that allows for thicker plastic bags to be labeled as "reusable" and exempted from the plastic bag ban. In my community, I've only seen one store, Shaws, that continues to use these thick plastic bags. Most stores have realized the dangers and moved to paper or utilizing cloth bags. In fact, this is one of the main reasons I personally shop at Hannaford's over Shaw's even though Shaw's is much closer to where I live. Because Hannaford uses paper bags instead of the thick plastic bags used at Shaw's. If I happen to forget my reusable bags, I know that I won't be coming home with the thick plastic bags that are not recyclable. According to Eco Maine there is no way to recycle any plastic bag here in Maine and the bags like the ones used at Shaw's routinely clog their machines.

We urge the committee to oppose LDs 56 and 69 and support LD 1122. Thank you for your time

² Yang CZ, Yaniger SI, Jordan VC, Klein DJ, Bittner GD. Most plastic products release estrogenic chemicals: a potential health problem that can be solved. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2011;119(7):989–996. doi:10.1289/ehp.1003220

³ Center for International Environmental Law. Plastic and Health. The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet. <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Plastic-and-Health-The-Hidden-Costs-of-a-Plastic-Planet-February-2019.pdf> Published February 2019. Accessed April 21, 2019