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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler in opposition to
**LD 1564, An Act to Delay Implementation of Recent Changes to Maine's
Beverage Container Redemption Law**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources

Good afternoon, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. I am Allison Hepler and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. I am here today to speak about my concerns with **LD 1564, An Act to Delay Implementation of Recent Changes to Maine's Beverage Container Redemption Law**.

Two years ago, this committee worked collaboratively and worked hard with a number of diverse stakeholders to overhaul a system to make it more sustainable and more efficient, and to increase the redemption rate of Maine's most successful recycling program. And we are already seeing the results of the improvements that you made, which is why I believe that delaying implementation would be detrimental to the program.

My concerns are threefold:

First, the system is working well. As a result of your support for increases to the handling fee and the re-organization of the commingling program that reduces sorts at redemption centers, redemption centers are opening or re-opening. You might recall that our bottle redemption programs were closing in 2022. Now, within 20 minutes of my home, two new redemption centers have opened. Within 25 minutes of my home, another has re-opened. The gentleman who opened one of those new centers told me that the changes made to the law in 2023 was one reason he decided to take this chance to open his small business. The system is working.

Second, in its operation plan, the Maine Beverage Redemption Group (the commingling cooperative) has included the same dates as established in the current statute. Members have already been working and are apparently ready to move forward with all of the requirements and deadlines in existing law.

Third, many elements of the existing statute are funded by the escheats, the unredeemed nickels that go back to the initiators of deposit. By law, the unclaimed deposits must be placed in a separate account to pay for a number of purposes, including: an annual fee of \$600,000 to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for oversight and review costs; \$500,000 to DEP's Cost and Carbon Efficient Technology Fund for grants to stakeholders for technology investments; and \$500,000, which stays

within the cooperative, for investments in refillable container programs. The program is also required to reimburse redemption centers for the large plastic bags beginning this year. These payments should not be delayed.

For these reasons, please don't delay the implementation of these key elements of the program. Maine's overhauled bottle redemption program is off to a very good start, thanks to the good work you did two years ago. Thanks for your time. I'll do my best to answer any questions you have.