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THE MAINE SENATE
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**Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on
LD 1423, An Act to Improve Recycling by Updating the Stewardship
Program for Packaging
April 23, 2025**

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I was proud to be one of the primary sponsors of Maine's Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging law, LD 1541, when it passed with bipartisan support in 2021. I've stood by this program since day one because I believe it represents a fairer, smarter, and more fiscally responsible approach to managing Maine's waste.

For too long, the cost of packaging waste has been pushed onto our municipalities and property taxpayers. Local budgets are strained, and towns have had to make tough decisions—cutting back on recycling programs or diverting funds away from core services like education and infrastructure. That's not a sustainable system. The beauty of this law is its simplicity: **those who create waste should be the ones who pay to manage it.**

That principle is not only fair—it's proven. Extended producer responsibility systems like this are working around the world. And since we passed this law, five other states have followed suit and more are coming down the pike. We've seen success with similar programs here in Maine for electronics, paint, and pharmaceuticals. There's no reason packaging should be treated differently—especially when it makes up nearly one-third of our waste stream.

Since the law passed, the Department of Environmental Protection has done an admirable job bringing stakeholders together, collecting input, and designing a program that is well-balanced and ready for launch. Now is the time to move forward—not to second-guess or unwind what has already been carefully built.

That's why I oppose LD 1423 as currently drafted.

This bill includes provisions that would weaken the foundation of the law by opening the door to broad exemptions. That would shift costs right back onto municipalities and taxpayers—undermining the very purpose of the legislation. It would also create an uneven playing field for producers. We worked hard to create a level system, and we shouldn't throw that away to satisfy a few powerful interests.

Now, I do agree that there may be room for a few clarifying changes before the program goes live—particularly if they improve consistency with other states or make the system easier to

administer. For example, aligning the definition of “producer” or adding a clear definition of “consumer” could help affirm that this program is focused on municipal waste—not industrial or manufacturing materials. But let’s be clear: any changes we make should strengthen the program—not weaken it nor delay it any longer.

This program has the potential to not only improve recycling and reduce pollution, but to **deliver real financial relief** to communities across the state. That was the Legislature’s intent, and it remains our mandate.

I urge the Committee to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1423. Let’s protect Maine’s taxpayers, keep our commitments to municipalities, and allow this program to launch as intended. Thank you for the opportunity to testify—and for your continued leadership on this important issue.