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Testimony of Newell Augur,
On behalf of Casella Waste Systems, Inc.

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

In Support of LD 297, An Act Regarding the Management of Oversized Bulky Waste from Wastewater Treatment Plants

Sponsored by Representative William Bridgeo

April 28, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Newell Augur. I am a resident of Yarmouth, a native of Portland, and a lawyer with Pierce Atwood. On behalf of Casella Waste Systems, Inc., I am here to testify in support of LD 297, An Act Regarding the Management of Oversized Bulky Waste from Wastewater Treatment Plants.

We want to thank Representative Bridgeo for sponsoring this proposal and Representative Soboleski for the prior work that he has done in highlighting this issue. We also appreciate Commissioner Loyzim and her staff for their engagement in helping to find solutions to our biosolids or "sludge" management disposal challenges.

The passage of LD 1911 and LD 1639 in 2022 upended the way the State of Maine manages biosolids disposal. LD 1911 ended the practice of land-spreading composted biosolids, forcing most of it into the state-owned Juniper Ridge Landfill (JRL). LD 1639 reduced the amount of oversized bulky waste that ReSource Lewiston could send to the landfill as a residual from its recycling operation. Because sludge is a wet waste, it must be mixed with a bulking agent to preserve the safety and stability of the landfill. And oversized bulky waste is one of the best material – if not the best – to provide that stability and preserve landfill space.

The additional 1,000 tons per month of sludge on average that was brought to JRL for disposal because of LD 1911 – a 15% increase – would have been challenging under normal circumstances. That challenge was exacerbated by a significant decrease in the availability of oversized bulky waste because of LD 1639. This is on top of the constant volatility of inbound volumes at JRL.

Because there is not an environmentally appropriate bulking alternative that can be consistently delivered in sufficient supply, JRL was obligated to temporarily halt sludge acceptance in February 2023. Through work with our wastewater district partners, we were able to patch together a short-term solution to solve this crisis, namely sending sludge to New Brunswick for disposal. However, this was never meant to be a viable long-term option.

In order to continually maintain the structural integrity of the landfill, wet waste must be managed to approximately 8 to 12% of the total intake. JRL is currently accepting wet waste at a rate of 8%. The

wet waste needs to be mixed with an appropriate amount of bulking agents – usually "bypass" municipal solid waste or oversized bulky waste – to prevent the landfill from collapsing in on itself. The sources and availability of bulking material are constantly changing. More sludge in the landfill challenges our capacity to manage all wastes. In 2024, approximately 63,000 tons of sludge from Maine wastewater districts was disposed at JRL. As a result, the landfill is filling up at a faster rate than previously anticipated. That also challenges the State's ability to use the landfill in a way to meet Maine's waste disposal needs. As an example, JRL has been asked to accept additional wet waste from dredging operations, but was unable to do so.

Based on 2022 acceptance rates of all materials, we identified a deficit of 25,000 tons of oversized bulky waste that would have to be replaced with an - as yet unidentified - equivalent material. Replacing 25,000 tons of oversized bulky waste cannot take place overnight, and the amount of wet waste generated in Maine is not decreasing. Recognizing this, the 131st Legislature - with the leadership of this Committee – passed LD 718. LD 718 recognized the magnitude of the challenge by putting a two-year delay on the full implementation of LD 1639. (There are other parts of LD 1639 that have taken effect). This allowed for temporary acceptance of oversized bulky waste at the State-owned landfill from existing sources while new solutions are explored.

In the intervening time, all stakeholders have been examining ways to solve this problem. At Casella, we are working with Viridi Energy as that company seeks to construct a renewable energy digester in Maine that would reduce the volume of sludge requiring disposal at JRL by more than 80% and, at the same time, create renewable natural gas sufficient to heat more than 3,500 homes. ReSource Lewiston has worked to shift focus from construction and demolition debris originating outside of Maine to sources of construction and demolition debris within Maine. Wastewater districts have explored the construction of dryers or other infrastructure to reduce the volume of sludge that they generate. The Maine DEP is now supporting a bond that would allow municipal wastewater districts to access funds to support those efforts.

The State can further assist in this transition by implementing strategies and creating incentives to recycle the estimated 500,000 annual tons of raw in-state CDD. Beyond these efforts, though, success has been limited. More time is necessary in order for a successful and uneventful transition to take place. This bill proposes an additional three years as the multiple initiatives referenced above can, hopefully, come to fruition.

In conclusion, Casella continues to pursue all options to improve biosolids management. Construction of a renewable natural gas facility recently began at JRL. Landfilling sludge contributes significantly to methane gas generated by a landfill, and this new RNG facility once it is operational will collect that methane gas and put it to beneficial use that reduces overall greenhouse gas emissions.

We look forward to working with the administration and the Legislature to find better solutions for sludge disposal as we continue to explore innovative ways to serve all our customers. I'd be happy to answer any questions and will be present for the work session.