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THE MAINE SENATE
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Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski in support of
LD 1793, An Act to Improve Management and Reduce the Volume of Solid Waste
Before the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
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Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and distinguished members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Nicole Grohoski, and I represent Senate District 7, which covers most of Hancock County. I am pleased to present LD 1793, "An Act to Improve Management and Reduce the Volume of Solid Waste."

Summary of the Bill

This bill is a comprehensive step forward in strengthening Maine's ability to manage waste in an environmentally and economically responsible way. Specifically it:

- Clarifies the Department of Environmental Protection's authority to ensure waste management practices align with Maine's priorities of waste reduction, recycling, and pollution prevention.
- Establishes a new Waste Solutions Task Force to bring municipalities, haulers, processors, and landfill operators together to identify cost-effective waste management solutions.
- Requires applicants for new or amended solid waste facility licenses to engage meaningfully with surrounding communities and demonstrate how community input informs facility operations.
- Improves transparency by requiring annual public reporting on waste origins, volumes, and final destinations.
- Expands eligibility for the Maine Solid Waste Diversion Grant Program to support a broader range of waste reduction activities.
- Creates a pilot program to test innovative, cost-saving waste management approaches, including regional cooperation and waste volume reduction strategies.

Why This Bill Is Needed

Maine's waste management challenges are mounting. Our state's solid waste diversion rate — the amount of material recycled, composted, or otherwise kept out of landfills — has plateaued and, in some areas, declined. Without stronger waste diversion programs, we are exhausting state landfill capacity well ahead of schedule. Communities are paying ever-higher tipping fees, which are reflected in property tax increases, and the public is concerned about the environmental and health impacts of inadequate solid waste management.

Moreover, Maine's aging solid waste infrastructure and limited regional coordination often leave municipalities on their own to solve these complex and expensive challenges. The failing solid waste management "system" in my region is a top concern that municipal leaders ask me to take action on. Nearly all municipal solid waste in eastern Maine is going straight to the Juniper Ridge Landfill at this time. A few towns are recycling limited materials, and some private residents and businesses are composting, but that's about it.

As outlined in Maine's Solid Waste Management Hierarchy, the most environmentally and economically beneficial actions — waste reduction, reuse, and recycling — must be prioritized above landfilling, which should only be a last resort.

This bill tackles the problem that municipalities face head-on by fostering collaboration, piloting regional waste management models, and providing more robust support to towns and cities. It enhances transparency — by making waste flow data available to the public — to empower municipalities, policymakers, and residents to make informed decisions and ensure that our waste management system serves the public interest.

Maine has already laid important groundwork through its product stewardship programs (including EPR for packaging), by encouraging composting, and supporting community initiatives like tool-lending libraries and repair cafés. LD 1793 builds on these efforts by offering municipalities more tools, greater transparency, and new pathways for collaboration.

Conclusion

This bill offers smart, forward-thinking strategies to modernize Maine's waste management system. By fostering regional cooperation, strengthening public oversight, and elevating waste reduction efforts, we can protect our environment, safeguard public health, and ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this legislation.