

LD 1793 - Testimony of Ed Meadows IN FAVOR

April 28, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

I am Ed Meadows, resident of Trenton, near Ellsworth.
I am representing myself (and not any interest group).

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of this bill.

The bill has many benefits and no downsides.

In many Maine towns, like Trenton, the cost of solid waste disposal is the second highest line item in the town budget - only after the cost of education. It's a direct increase in local property tax.

I've lived in six different towns in Maine and three other states. Thus, I've seen many different ways towns and states deal with solid waste.

I was appointed to the Trenton Solid Waste Committee to help work on this issue. We have focused on costs, in effort to contain property tax burden. (These comments are mine and do not reflect the Town of Trenton, or the Solid Waste Committee.)

In Maine there is no coordinated system for waste disposal. Each town deals with it as best they can. Some towns have town-wide pick up. Others don't. About one-third of Maine towns use the "pay to throw" system. But not others. In other states solid waste is handled by the county or regional entity to take advantage of economies of scale.

Recycling costs more per ton than solid waste disposal. It's cheaper to just throw everything in the trash. That just adds to the problem of running out of landfill space.

Many people are unaware of how the costs work. Let's say you pay someone to pick up your trash. That is not the end of the story. The truck takes it to transfer station, landfill, or wherever it goes. The town is then billed for the tonnage. That cost goes into the town budget, to be added to your property tax. So you pay twice.

How your town does it may not be how the next town over handles it.

I recall when the State created the Maine Waste Management Agency. It had many of the goals in LD 1793. But the agency was eliminated in state budget cuts and government downsizing thirty years ago. Since then, the problem has only intensified.

Trying to deal with this locally feels like it is "every town for itself." We need a better way.

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Many towns in eastern Maine are trying to work with the disposal facilities in Hampden and Orrington. However, constant delays, equipment problems and financial setbacks make it difficult for any certainty about when they may operate. These facilities do present the opportunity to rethink how waste is collected, transported and handled.

Let's say a town wants to explore a more cost effective method of collection and disposal.

- Where do they get the data to make a cost analysis?
- Where can they find models of places that have done this successfully?

That is what LD 1793 is all about.

The bill authorizes the DEP to provide leadership to resolve these problems. I saw how important this is when I served as Commissioner of the Department of Conservation. Legislative support gives weight to the department's role in convening stakeholders.

This support directs everyone to think of better ways of collection and handling, with emphasis on efficiency and cost reduction - to the state, towns, businesses and taxpayers.

The bill provides what towns need:

- A central source of information
- Technical assistance
- Possible grant funds to implement solutions
- A task force of knowledgeable people to examine the issue and identify solutions
- It requests a report back with options for solutions.

Personally, I'd rather see more immediate action right now.

But, my experience with complex public policy issues says the idea of carefully evaluating long-term solutions can be a good first step.

Finally, cost. Yes, there may be cost with this. However, based on what we see all over the state, the cost of the program in this LD is likely far less than being spent now, town by town. Doing these things likely involves less time and less cost than the cost and time now directed by state and local governments, and private business to these issues. Or, the costs to everybody will be lower over time.

This LD addresses critical issues. It points us in a better direction for the future.

I urge you to support passage of this much-needed LD.
Thank you.

Ed Meadows, Trenton; avocet2014@yahoo.com; cell 517-974-3064