

February 22, 2021

Sen. Stacy Brenner
Rep. Ralph Tucker
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Cross Building, Rm. 216
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Sen. Brenner, Rep. Tucker, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

We regret that we are unable to attend the hearing for LDs 39, 108, and 244 via Zoom and greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to efforts to overturn the state's single-use plastic bag ban.

We are members of the Materials Management Research Group at the University of Maine's Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions. Our group draws on interdisciplinary academic expertise, as well as long-term stakeholder engagement with partners across the state to identify sustainable materials management solutions in the state of Maine. Through our work with materials managers, local officials, and industry leaders we have a deep understanding of both the challenges and potential solutions for materials management in Maine.

We are happy to convey a number of important insights pertinent to the proposed legislation:

Single-use plastic is a serious problem

- More than 100 billion single-use plastic bags are consumed in the US per year.¹
- Single-use plastic bags are used, on average, for just 12 minutes.²
- Because they are lightweight and capable of filling with air, plastic bags easily escape into the environment where they are a major source of pollution.¹
- Plastic bags are one of the most common sources of marine pollution, a critical consideration for a coastal state dependent on marine resources, like Maine.¹
- While single-use plastic bags are technically recyclable, they are not recycled in Maine when comingled with single-sort recyclables.³
- Single-use plastic bags get caught in recycling equipment resulting in reduced capacity to process recycling necessitating daily removal of the bags by hand, which increases the cost for processing recyclables in Maine.³

Reusable bags are safe and widespread

¹ Wagner, Travis P. 2017. "Reducing Single-Use Plastic Shopping Bags in the USA." *Waste Management* 70 (December): 3–12.
doi:[10.1016/j.wasman.2017.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wasman.2017.09.003).

² EPA. 2016. "Plastic Shopping Bags: Options Paper." New South Wales: Environment Protection Authority, New South Wales.
<https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/~media/EPA/Corporate%20Site/resources/waste/160143-plastic-shopping-bags-options.ashx>.

³ Wagner, Travis. 2016. "Municipal Approaches in Maine to Reduce Single-Use Consumer Products." *Maine Policy Review* 25 (2): 31–43.

- Research from Athens, Ohio showed that within the research sample, the vast majority of shoppers (88%) already owned reusable grocery bags, suggesting that the switch to reusable bags will not present a substantial burden for shoppers.⁴
- Even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, reusable grocery bags have been shown to be a safe option when paired with basic hygiene practices, like handwashing.⁵

Policy is an effective & popular tool for reducing single-use plastic waste

- Policy to tax plastic bags in Ireland has resulted in a 90% reduction in plastic bag use.⁶
- In many contexts, policies to ban and tax single-use plastic bags have been found to be popular with residents.⁷

Kind regards,

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Michael Haedicke, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology

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Jean MacRae, PhD, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Deborah A. Saber, PhD, School of Nursing

Linda Silka, PhD, Senior Fellow, Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions

Travis Wagner, PhD, Professor, Department of Environmental Science & Policy, University of Southern Maine

These comments reflect our views and expertise and do not speak on behalf of the University.

⁴ Dalzell, Jessica, and Amy J. Lynch. 2020. "Thinking Beyond the Plastic Bag Ban: Reusable Bag Habits and Motivators in Athens, Ohio." *Geographical Bulletin* 61 (2). Gamma Theta Upsilon: 71–83.

⁵ "Health Expert Statement Addressing Safety of Reusables and COVID-19." 2020. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f218f677f1fdb38f06cebcb/t/5f2440cc6a74cc6a860708b4/1596211404419/Health+Expert+Statement+Version+9.pdf>.

⁶ Convery, Frank, Simon McDonnell, and Susana Ferreira. 2007. "The Most Popular Tax in Europe? Lessons from the Irish Plastic Bags Levy." *Environmental and Resource Economics* 38 (1): 1–11. doi:[10.1007/s10640-006-9059-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10640-006-9059-2).

⁷ Convery, Frank, Simon McDonnell, and Susana Ferreira. 2007. "The Most Popular Tax in Europe? Lessons from the Irish Plastic Bags Levy." *Environmental and Resource Economics* 38 (1): 1–11. doi:[10.1007/s10640-006-9059-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10640-006-9059-2).

Dalzell, Jessica, and Amy J. Lynch. 2020. "Thinking Beyond the Plastic Bag Ban: Reusable Bag Habits and Motivators in Athens, Ohio." *Geographical Bulletin* 61 (2). Gamma Theta Upsilon: 71–83.