



Testimony in Opposition of LD 39, LD 108, and LD 244, Legislation to Repeal Maine's Ban on Single-Use Plastic Bags

Anya Fetcher, Environment Maine State Director, February 22, 2021

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Anya Fetcher and I'm the state director of Environment Maine, a citizen-based environmental advocacy organization. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong opposition to LD 39, LD 108, and LD 244.

The 129th Legislature voted to adopt LD 1532 in 2019, and the data they relied on to ban one of the most harmful forms of single-use plastic have not changed: plastic continues to threaten our health and wildlife. Further, the suggestion that plastic bags are safer to use than reusables during the pandemic was industry-influenced messaging, not based on science. Therefore, Environment Maine, representing thousands of members across the state, opposes this legislation to repeal Maine's ban on single-use plastic bags, as well as any efforts to further delay implementation of the bill.

Maine's ban on single-use plastic bags will:

- **Reduce Waste:** According to the Center for Biological Diversity, a plastic bag is used for an average of 12 minutes, but can persist in our environment, and pollute our communities, for generations. Nothing we use for a few minutes should be allowed to pollute our communities and the Bay for hundreds of years—especially when we don't really need it.
- **Reduce Waste:** Each year, the average American uses more than 300 single-use disposable bags, and only about 1% of these bags are returned for recycling, with even fewer actually going through the process. Additionally, plastic bags can only go through the recycling process once or twice - recycling delays a plastic bag's inevitable disposal in a landfill, our waterways, or an incinerator but it certainly doesn't prevent it.
- **Reduce Waste:** We do not need single use plastic bags. They were only introduced in this country in the 1970's. We had a civilized, modern society before these bags became part of everyday commercial life, and we need to move away from them.
- **Reduce pollution:** Plastic bag disposal is a lose/lose/lose. Virtually un-recyclable, when we dispose of them they end up buried in leaky landfills or burned in incinerators. If they get loose they end up littering our neighborhoods, roads, and waterways. Plastic bags are lightweight and can be caught by the wind and carried into our waterways where it

eventually leads to the ocean. Plastic bag waste harms health, quality of life, and the environment.

- Reduce pollution: According to many different sources, it takes more than 500 years for a plastic bag to degrade. The bags don't break down completely but instead photo-degrade, becoming microplastics that absorb toxins and continue to pollute the environment.
- Reduce pollution: For a bird or fish or turtle, it's easy to mistake a small piece of plastic for food—especially when there are millions of pieces of plastic floating in our waterways. Scientists have found plastic fragments in literally hundreds of species, including 86% of all sea turtle species, 44% of all seabird species, and 43% of all marine mammal species. Ingesting these fragments is often fatal. Animals starve when they ingest too much plastic that they can't digest.
- Protect our climate: Plastic bags are made of fossil fuels. The more plastic bags are manufactured, the more we are using fossil fuels. According to National Geographic about 8 percent of the world's oil production is used to make plastic and power the manufacturing of it. That figure is projected to rise to 20 percent by 2050. Every part of a single-use plastic's lifespan emits greenhouse gases. From production to shipping to disposal, single-use plastics make it increasingly less likely that we will stay beneath the 1.5 degree celsius threshold. If we fail to do that, we will be unable to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change.
- Good public policy: Across the country, plastic bag bans have passed in over 350 cities and communities, and 25 Maine towns and cities have plastic bag policies. Additionally, Maine's plastic bag policy is supported by the Retail Association of Maine, Maine Grocers and Food Producers Association, and Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition.

We hope the committee will listen to science and the voices of Mainers, and vote against LD 39, LD 108, and LD 244. Thank you for your time.

Resources and references:

- [Keeping Plastics in the Circular Economy](#)
- [It's Official: Reusables Are Safe During Covid-19](#)
- [2018 National Post-Consumer Plastic Bag & Film Recycling Report](#)
- [Fast Facts about Plastic Pollution](#)
- [Plastic and Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet](#)