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Testimony of Representative Lydia Blume introducing LD 618, “An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons”
March 29, 2021

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, I am Representative Lydia Blume and I represent the coastal part of York. I come before you today to introduce LD 618, “An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons.”

The principal change this bill makes is to reclassify balloons as litter, and the intentional release of balloons as littering. The goal is to put a stop to large-scale intentional balloon releases and to get people to take steps to prevent balloons from getting loose and seeing that they are properly disposed of.

I know there are many who have wondered why Maine might need this kind of legislation. Well, as colorful and festive as balloons might look, they are nonetheless killing large numbers of animals. In fact, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service tells us that balloons pose a real threat to both land-based and sea-based animals. Animals are all likely to see a balloon, mistake it for food, and then either eat it, choke on it or get fatally tangled in the attached string or ribbon.

Balloons don’t break down over time, and they aren’t digestible. A simple Google image search will underscore for you the damage balloons regularly do. You’ll see what happens when balloons are mistaken for jelly fish or when whales wash up on shore after dying from eating too much plastic. Of all the marine debris out there on the ocean, balloons are the number one killer of seabirds.

We live in a state that depends economically on having a healthy coastline and pristine wilderness areas. The lobster industry alone generates more than \$1 billion in economic activity. LD 618 would help us improve the health of our food chain, save the lives of animals and help us along on our long journey away from plastics.

And, as an aside, this isn’t just about animals. According to the Natural Resources Council of Maine, balloons have long been the leading cause of toy-related choking deaths, and most balloon accidents have involved children under six.

I will admit that a similar bill last session received its share of groans and eye rolls in some quarters. But lest the committee conclude that this is just the latest case of joyless, regulation-happy politicians out to ruin children's fun and extinguish freedoms light in the process, please consider that this is an actual public policy problem that no one else is going to solve for us. Balloons are in fact killing a lot of animals and are damaging some of the natural eco-systems Mainers depend on for food and their livelihoods.

We can and should look at this bill as an opportunity for Maine to join the other states and cities that have enacted similar measures to solve a genuine problem and save a lot of wildlife while we are at it. This bill doesn't ban anything, but it reminds us to be careful, and prods us to think twice before we do something that could harm the world around us.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to working with you on this bill.