



Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

March 29, 2021

RE: LD 618, An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons and LD 1023, An Act to Define Intentional Balloon Releases as Litter

Dear Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Allison Briggs, and I am a legal extern at Maine Audubon and a second-year law student at the University of Maine School of Law. Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of LDs 618 and 1023, on behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members and supporters.

Maine Audubon has previously shared with this Committee the harmful impact plastic pollution has on wildlife and seabirds in particular. Plastic bags, straws, and other single-use plastic beverage “accessories” are widely recognized as litter. Resources are committed to educating the public on how to properly dispose of—or better yet, limit the use of—these products for the benefit of our environment. Balloons, however, though equally or more harmful to wildlife, are not widely recognized as litter. Balloons are regularly released into the environment, either in celebration or memory, or deliberately abandoned. Few people make the connection that the balloon they release into the air will later return to earth, despoiling our environment. LDs 618 and 1023 seek to change that.

A recent study published in *Scientific Reports*¹ details the relationship between seabird mortality and balloons. There is a twenty percent chance that a bird will die from ingesting a single item of marine debris. Balloons, the study found, are the highest-risk debris item—a bird that ingests a balloon is thirty-two times more likely to die than a bird that ingests hard plastic.

Balloon litter is not just a coastal problem. Maine Audubon’s Scarborough Marsh Director Linda Woodard shared that, several years ago, she found a balloon in the marsh. On closer inspection, she saw a school’s name printed on the balloon. The school was familiar—Maine Audubon had done educational programming at the school, which is located in Bangor, well over 100 miles away from where she stood. Linda shared the story with a teacher and the teacher, like so many others, hadn’t considered what happened to balloons once they are released into the air.

Both bills will help Mainers make the connection by specifically listing balloons as “litter” under

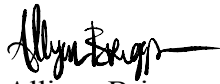
¹ Lauren Roman et al., *A Quantitative Analysis Linking Seabird Mortality and Marine Debris Ingestion*, 9 SCI. REPS. (2019), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-36585-9.pdf>.

Maine's existing litter laws. LD 618, in particular, reflects the significant work done within this Committee during the 129th Legislature, in which the Committee amended a very similar bill to limit its scope to *intentional* acts. This change reflects the former Committee's strong interest in seeking to change the behavior of individuals that seek to deliberately release balloons—not those that may do so by mistake.

LD 618 also incorporates intentional balloon releases into the existing graduated fine structure; the more balloons someone releases, the higher the fine will be. Maine Audubon believes this is useful because it would levy a meaningful fine against those who release huge clusters or netfuls of balloons at sporting events or other ceremonies. This practice is particularly egregious and larger fines may be necessary to stop these incidences.

Maine Audubon encourages the Committee to support LDs 618 and 1023.

Sincerely,



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