



# Maine Conservation Voters

*Inform. Vote. Protect.*

Testimony of Maine Conservation Voters

## **In Support of LD 618**

An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons

*Before the Committee On Environment and Natural Resources*

March 29, 2021

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee On Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Francesca Gundrum, Communications Manager for Maine Conservation Voters (MCV). MCV protects Maine's environment and our democracy by making conservation, equity, and voting rights political priorities. I'm testifying today in support of LD 618.

I have spent thousands of hours at sea and along our coasts studying Maine's wildlife. I received my MS in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Maine in 2019 and have worked as a marine mammal research scientist with Allied Whale at the College of the Atlantic, as an ocean naturalist with the Bar Harbor Whale Watch, and as a coastal birds biologist with Maine Audubon's Piping Plover and Least Tern Recovery Project. I have seen more deflated, sun-bleached balloons floating in the Gulf of Maine than anyone needs to see in a lifetime; I have personally collected hundreds of balloons from our ocean and beaches. I am testifying today to urge this committee to help encourage Maine citizens to celebrate life's big moments responsibly.

When a balloon is released, it always finds its way back down. They pollute our forests, clog our waterways, and can harm or kill land and marine wildlife. Sea turtles mistake balloons for their staple jellyfish, whales can unknowingly ingest them as they feed, and birds can easily get tangled in the attached ribbons. I have personally seen it all; it's time for our state to address this issue and define the release or abandonment of balloons as littering.

While out on research trips or leading whale watching tours, my captains would do their best to slow down for us to grab as many balloons as possible each trip, but we were always

outnumbered. When I worked as a coastal birds biologist last summer, I carried an empty backpack with me on all my surveys to collect plastic debris. Balloons were amongst the top few items I collected near the nests of the endangered birds our team worked to protect. That backpack was often full at the end of each day.

I know we have all seen the “Happy Birthday!” relics snagged in trees or washed ashore. It is time to create new traditions to celebrate our milestones, but first, Maine must do what we can to protect our state’s wildlife and environment from balloons *now*.

**Over 355 Maine citizens signed our petition in support of this effort. I have attached said signatures to my testimony today.**

Thank you, Representative Blume, for presenting this bill to the committee. For the health of our wildlife and wild places, Maine Conservation Voters strongly supports this bill and urges you to vote “ought to pass.” Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and I am happy to answer any questions.



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## **Tell the Maine Legislature: Releasing balloons should be considered littering**

When a balloon is released, it always finds its way back down. They pollute our forests, clog our waterways, and can harm or kill land and marine wildlife. Sea turtles mistake balloons for their staple jellyfish, whales can unknowingly ingest them as they feed, and birds can easily get tangled in the attached ribbons.

Releasing balloons is NOT technically considered littering, but for the health of our wildlife and wild places, this needs to change. We're supporting two bills that would do just that.

**We must speak out now to ensure Maine lawmakers take the issue of balloon debris seriously.**

**Tell the Maine Legislature: Releasing balloons should be considered littering.**

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