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 1023.

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

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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.

Laurie Lundgren, Albion
Charles E Pierce, Arundel
Kirstan Lee Watson, Arundel
Herta Choquet, Auburn
Savannah Shaw, Auburn
Noel Smith, Auburn
Stephanie Kisilywicz, Augusta
Roberta Record, Augusta
Stacie Haines, Augusta
Codi Riley, Augusta
Debbie McCarthy, Avon
Sandra Joy, Bangor
Adele St. Pierre, Bangor
Eric Miller, Bangor
Elizabeth M. Somers, Bar Harbor
Roger M. Wilson, Bar Harbor
Jennifer Crandall, Bar Harbor

Jennifer Porter, Bar Mills
Laurie Beck, Bath
Adair D. DeLamater, Bath
Phyllis Hill, Bath
Lynn Weilbrenner, Bath
Argia Charles, Bath
Siri Beckman, Bath
Natalia Klimova, Bath
Joe Lendvai, Bath
Andrew Whitman, Bath
Dirk S. Faegre, Belfast
Christine M. Wentzel, Benton
Suzanne Madeira, Bernard
Donald Angevine, Bethel
Roger Zimmerman, Bethel
Allidah Iles, Bethel
John Wallach, Biddeford
Lee Chisholm, Freeport
Beth Ahearn, Freeport
Susan S. Alexander, Friendship
Susan Gerry, Friendship
William Sutton, Fryeburg
Isabelle Files, Gardiner
Kathryn Williams, Gorham
Douglas Green, Gorham
Vanessa Berrill, Gorham
Jeremy D. Dickson-Smith, Gouldsboro
Ann Roberts, Gouldsboro
Richard Frantz, Great Diamond Island
Rani Sheaffer, Hallowell
Julie Olson, Hallowell
Maureen Drouin, Hallowell
Joanna Damon, Harpswell
Deanna DeMatteo, Harpswell
Helenann Wright, Harpswell
Pam Dyer Stewart, Harrington
Gordon Lutz, Holden
Barbara Tennent, Holden
Cynthia Strout, Hollis Center
David Thompson, Hollis Center
Melissa Hall, Hope
Alyson Graham, Jefferson
Kristin Shearman, Jefferson
Tracy Moore, Kennebunk
Karen D. Tolstrup, Kennebunk
Leslie Allen, Kennebunk
David Reece, Kennebunk
Grace Cain, Kennebunk
Amy Welch, Kennebunk
Joel Brownstein, Kennebunkport
Mary McLaughlin, Kennebunkport
Laurie L. Rowan, Kittery
Jane & John A. Werner, Kittery
Emily Hennessy, Kittery
Judy Spiller, Kittery Point
Casey Kaemerer, Lamoine
Stephen Fontneau, Lebanon
Jim Handy, Lewiston
Jennifer Martin, Lewiston
Karen Stickney, Lewiston
Edward Z. Walworth, Lewiston
Natalie Titus, Lewiston
Jessica Decke, Lincolnville
Megan Leach, Long Pond Township
Mark Brown, Marshfield
Medora Van Denburgh, Medford
Michael MacPherson, Milbridge
Mary Jane Beardsley, Minot
Buck H. O'Herin, Montville
Edward Bromage, Mount Desert
Leah Taylor, Mount Desert
Bruce C Becque, Mount Desert
Nadya Mullen, N Yarmouth
Lawrence Anton, Naples
Carolyn Jo Meserve, Naples
Ken A. Brinnick, New Gloucester
Gina Sawin, New Gloucester
Benjamin Tettlebaum, New Gloucester
David Bilski, New Harbor
Kathleen A. Huntingdon, Newcastle
Shari Templeton, Newcastle
Amy Eshoo, North Yarmouth
Laurie Gilman, North Yarmouth
Sue B. Inches, North Yarmouth
Chris Cabot, North Yarmouth
Bethany & Ksenia Smart, North Yarmouth
Karen J. Young, Northport
Sally E. Kirkpatrick, Northport
Jess Cooper, Norway
N. Shantia Wright-Gray, Ocean Park
Vijay W. Macwan, Old Orchard Beach
Bruce P. Burnham, Old Town
Emily Chavis, Old Town
Paul Van Steenberghe, Old Town
Shirley L. Davis, Orono
Elizabeth Payne, Orono
Eva Szillery, Orono
Rebecca O'Neill, Orono
Barbara J. Cole, Orono
Zoë Lidstrom, Orono
Kathryn Dermarderosian, Owls Head
Edith Tierney, Palmyra
Betsy W. Newcomer, Parsonsfield
Angela Faeth, Peaks Island
Patricia Wainright, Peaks Island
Maggie Dewane, Pemaquid
Dotty W. Caldwell, Penobscot
Les Gross, Perry
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Jim Rodrigue, Pittston
Rhonda Cobb, Poland
Adinah Barnett, Portland
Robert F. Boothe, Portland
Charlotte Fullam, Portland
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Anita B. Jones, Portland
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Eve & Rebecca Sawyer, Portland
Lois Ann D. Winter, Portland
Taumi Conohan, Portland
Gretchen Stanton, Portland
Angela Garcia, Portland
Doug McCown, Portland
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Ananda Moor-Jankowski, Portland
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Ella Tabasky, Portland
Lauren O'Brien, Portland
Louise Jensen, Portland
Anna Wlodarczyk, Portland
Bob and Linda Webster, Portland
Chris McCoy, Portland
William Sedlack, Portland
Janet L. Lynch, Pownal
Andy Martin, Presque Isle
William Kolodnicki, Princeton
Pauline Blaylock, Readfield
Elizabeth Jackson, Robbinston

Lynn Hower Allen, Rockland
Abi Morrison, Rockland
Jody Solow, Rockland
Laurence Anne Coe, Rockland
William Frohlich, Rockport
Robert Lawrence, Rockport
Lindsey Andy Cadot, Roque Bluffs
Kate Webber, Sabattus
Kate Collins, Saco
Kenyon F. Karl, Saco
Jessica Vallette, Saco
Mary E. Finn, Saco
Dorcas Morgan, Saco
Donna Morin, Sanford
Rita M. Breton, Scarborough
Mallory Hattie, Scarborough
Duncan Perry, Scarborough
Deborah Grew, Scarborough
Mark Jacobs, Shapleigh
Mary E. Wheat, Shapleigh
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Susan Cottle, South China
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Laurie M. Fear, South Portland
Joe Hemes, South Portland
James Melloh, South Portland
Thea Sames, South Portland
Jean Sideris, South Portland
Jessica Skinner, South Portland
Leslie Runser, South Portland
Meghan O’ Brien, South Portland
Wes Pratt, South Thomaston
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Larry Gilman, Southwest Harbor
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Martin Willis, Spruce Head
Luwana Dyer, Steep Falls
Peggy Drake, Steuben
Abigail Bradford, Steuben
Paula Mrozicki, Surry
Dhyana Bisberg, Surry
Covering the state of Maine, the board includes members from various coastal and inland areas, reflecting the diversity of the state's community. Members hail from places such as Swans Island, Swanville, Tenants Harbor, Thomaston, Topsham, Trevett, Unity, Veazie, Vinalhaven, Waldoboro, Waterville, Wayne, Wellington, Wells, York, and many more. The community-minded individuals volunteer their time and expertise to ensure the success of the organization, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration across Maine's diverse regions. Their presence on the board exemplifies the interconnectedness of Maine's communities and the commitment to upholding the values of the organization they represent.