

Jennifer Kennedy
Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation

Dear Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee On Environment and Natural Resources:

I'm writing in support of LD 618, An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons. I'm a resident and homeowner in Eliot, ME, but and also the Executive Director of Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation, which is a Portsmouth, NH-based non-profit organization that works to protect marine life in the Gulf of Maine.

I support LD 618 because balloon litter is ubiquitous in public spaces and the marine environment, and it is a wholly unnecessary form of litter.

Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation has been doing beach cleanups since 2001 in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. In 2019, we found 326 balloons on the shoreline from York, ME to Salisbury, MA. Balloons aren't the most common item that we find on shore, but they are one of the top items we find on the water.

We also work aboard several whale watch boats in NH and MA, and record litter seen from the boats. Since we started recording pelagic litter in 2003, balloons have always been in the top 2 items we see out on the water (plastic bags are the other item). For example, during 1,986 whale watch trips in the Gulf of Maine during the summers from 2012-2017, we spotted 2,919 balloons (unpublished data). The material of the balloon was not always noted, but for those noted, 1,552 were mylar/"foil" balloons and 727 were latex balloons. Latex balloons are sometimes used by fishing boats, therefore some may have originated on the ocean. But the mylar balloons all likely originated from shore. Our observers reported a range of single balloons to sometimes bunches of 10-25 balloons floating or tied together. These balloons are located in prime habitat for whales, tuna and other marine life that come to the Gulf of Maine to feed during the summer.

Balloons pose a risk to marine life, which can become entangled in the balloon or their strings/ribbon or mistake them for food and ingest them. In 2014, Marine Mammals of Maine reported a balloon found inside the stomach of a stranded Atlantic white-sided dolphin in York, ME¹. A necropsy revealed a balloon in her stomach and intestines, which prevented her from eating and digesting her food. Sea turtles, several species of which inhabit the Gulf of Maine, are well-known as examples of animals that eat balloons that they mistake for jellyfish.

Balloons may be a fun way to celebrate an event, and can have a place in indoor celebrations, but there are many readily-available alternatives to use for celebrations and memorials. Many people are unaware of the dangers that balloons can pose in the environment, but once they learn of their problems, they are happy to use alternatives. LD 618 will help reduce the dangers to wildlife and provide a cleaner environment for us all to enjoy.

Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation strongly supports this bill and on behalf of the organization and as a Maine resident, I urge you to vote "ought to pass." Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at 603-834-0253 or jen@blueoceansociety.org.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kennedy
Eliot, ME

1 Marine Mammals of Maine, <https://www.mmome.org/atlantic-white-sided-dolphin-york/>, also personal communication with Lynda Doughty, Executive Director