



**Testimony in Support of
LD 618 An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons
and LD 1023 An Act to Define Intentional Balloon Releases as Litter**

Sarah Nichols, NRCM Sustainable Maine Director, March 29th, 2021

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Sarah Nichols and I am the Sustainable Maine Director for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you in support of these two proposals (LD 618 and LD 1023) to discourage the intentional release of balloons into Maine's environment.

Releasing balloons into the air is littering because what goes up must come down. Planned balloon releases should be viewed similarly as if a group of people tossed a bunch of plastic bags on the ground and walked away. Balloon releases are arguably even worse because we don't know where they will land, and they can burst into tiny pieces as they descend from the sky. That is why NRCM supports the proposed penalties assessed on the *release* of balloons in LD 618—because it would be nearly impossible to impose a fine on the weight of litter that cannot be retrieved.

Floating balloon debris is a visible, well documented problem in Maine waters. At a national level, one analysis concludes that balloon pollution is the 15th most common item of litter found in clean-ups across the U.S.¹ Data also suggests that balloons cause more deaths in seabirds than any other type of marine debris. Researchers found that balloons are 32 times more likely to result in death in seabirds than ingesting hard plastic.²

Mass balloon release events³ happen regularly in Maine, in rural and urban areas, primarily with plastic ribbons attached. Those who watch inflated balloons disappear are detached in time and location from the <https://www.oecd.org/env/waste/ghg-materialsmanagement.htm> balloons coming back to earth or at sea. As a result, individuals do not consider balloon releases as littering. We believe that by passing this legislation it will be made clear that purposefully releasing balloons into the environment is against the law.

Maine should join other environmentally minded jurisdictions⁴ that have prohibited outdoor balloon releases. We urge the Committee to combine these bills into one and vote ought-to-pass. Thank you for your time and consideration of this common-sense legislation that will contribute to the protection of Maine's environment and wildlife.

¹Source: [Better Alternatives Now \(BAN\) 2.0, An analysis and call-to-action to phase out the most polluting plastic products used in the United States](#)

²Journal of Scientific Reports: Balloons the No. 1 marine debris risk of mortality for seabirds University of Tasmania, March 1, 2019 https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2019-03/uot-bt022719.php

³ Event organizers can consider many alternative events to honor, celebrate, or raise awareness of their cause including planting trees or gardens, a litter clean-up, floating flowers, dedicating a park bench, or lighting candles.

⁴ States and cities with balloon release laws include: California; Connecticut; Florida; Tennessee; Virginia; Ocean City, Maryland; Louisville, Kentucky; Nantucket, Massachusetts; Provincetown, Massachusetts; Block Island, Rhode Island.