

**TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER
IN SUPPORT OF
L.D. 618, “An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons”
L.D. 1023, “An Act to Define Intentional Balloon Releases as Litter”
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
March 29, 2021**

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony in support of L.D. 618, “An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons” and L.D. 1023, “An Act to Define Intentional Balloon Releases as Litter.”

I wrote in favor of a similar bill (L.D. 937) last session. It was such a disappointment to see an environmentally beneficial, common-sense proposal fail, despite tremendous public support during the public hearing and throughout the legislative process. As a result, I am thrilled to see these two proposals under consideration. I suspect the two will be merged into one bill, and hope that this time around, the legislative outcome will better reflect the will of Maine citizens who are fighting for the preservation of our environment and the animals that live in it.

Releasable helium balloons represent an intentional and legal form of litter. Think about it, we buy balloons and release them into the air with no thought as to where they go or what damage they might cause. The same community that teaches a child to recycle, to not litter and to respect the environment and animals, also sets an example that releasing floating latex into the air is socially acceptable and fun with no consideration of the impact those pieces of latex have on marine life, birds and other animals. Although, we should not have to legislate common sense, sometimes there is no other option. This is one of those times.

In 1991, the Maine branch of the Sierra Club, while testifying on a similar bill, stated that up to 100,000 marine mammals and two million seabirds die each year after eating or becoming entangled in man-made debris dumped in our oceans. There is little doubt those numbers are significantly higher today. Although balloons only make up a percentage of that waste, the damage they cause is unnecessary and easily addressed. According to the [Balloons Blow website](#), beach litter surveys have shown the number of balloons and balloon pieces found on the beach have tripled in the past 10 years. We need to act today to stop this growing trend in its tracks.

Dolphins, whales, turtles, and many other marine species, as well as terrestrial animals such as cows, dogs, sheep, tortoises, birds and other animals have all been hurt or killed by balloons. The animal is usually killed from the balloon blocking its digestive tract, leaving them unable to take in any more nutrients. It slowly starves to death. The animals can also become entangled in the balloon and its ribbon making the animal unable to move to escape predators or to search for food.

The balloon industry claims that latex balloons are biodegradable. Natural latex may be biodegradable, but after adding chemicals, plasticizers and artificial dyes, how natural could it be? It may degrade after several years, but it's surely not “biodegradable.” Unless the balloons are compostable (which they are not) the danger to wildlife and marine animals is the same whether it takes months or years for the latex to degrade.

These proposals present a reasonable solution that will prevent unnecessary littering and save the lives of our precious marine and terrestrial wildlife and birds, as well as the lives of pets and farm animals. As a result, I urge members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources to vote “ought to pass” on L.D. 618, “An Act Regarding the Outdoor Release or Abandonment of Balloons” and L.D. 1023, “An Act to Define Intentional Balloon Releases as Litter.”

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susanna Richer
Portland, ME

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1023.