



**Testimony in Support of LD 1467,  
An Act to Promote a Circular Economy through Increased Postconsumer Recycled Plastic  
Content in Plastic Beverage Containers**

*Sarah Nichols, NRCM Sustainable Maine Director, April 26, 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 LD 1467.

We support this bill because it will help bolster recycling markets by increasing demand for post-consumer recycled plastic, which includes the material collected by Maine's very successful Beverage Container Redemption Program (aka the Bottle Bill).

Overall, we strongly support initiatives to reduce the volume of disposable plastic packaging in society. The impacts of plastics on the environment and human health are well established. At every stage of the plastic life-cycle – from production to disposal — there are significant human health impacts that disproportionately affect economically and socially disadvantaged people. The production and incineration of plastic alone produces more than 850 million metric tons of greenhouse gases—equal to the emissions from 189 500MW coal power plants.<sup>1</sup> Of the 380 million tons of plastic produced each year, 40% is used for packaging. It's estimated that there are 150 million metric tons of plastic in the marine environment already, and every year we add about 8 million metric tons more. These are just a few of the reasons why we need to reduce our reliance on plastic and pursue more reusable and refillable beverage containers.

However, we do have a lot of disposable plastic containers—and we need to do a much better job at managing that waste. One of the key strategies to reduce the need to create new products from virgin plastic is to recycle the plastic we already have. According to the Association of Plastics Recyclers, using recycled PET (rPET) plastic to make new containers instead of new virgin PET plastic cuts carbon pollution by 67%. Unfortunately, rPET is 20-25% more expensive for beverage manufacturers to purchase than virgin, fossil-fuel derived PET plastic. This cost differential is why a minimum post-consumer recycled content standard is needed—to level the playing field for beverage companies and drive demand for recycled plastic over cheap virgin plastic.

For recycling to work, the material being dutifully tossed into the recycling bin needs to have a market—or value in the supply chain. Even better, the material being recycled should be of high-value—meaning that it is clean and free of contamination. That is why this policy supports our Bottle Bill—or what I like to refer to as the *Gold Star* of recycling programs. Maine's Bottle Bill gets the highest return rate and the cleanest materials when compared to municipal recycling. This clean material is what can most readily be turned back into another bottle, versus downcycled into a rug, building materials, or textiles. Policies like the one proposed by LD 1467 can help drive the need for more recycling programs, with less contamination, which is what we need to move us

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Center for International Law: <https://www.ciel.org/plasticandclimate/>

closer to an economy where used products become the raw materials for manufacturing new products—often referred to as a “circular economy.”

I’d like to see the State of Maine take more steps to reduce unneeded plastic packaging, but that’s a bill (or bills) for another day. LD 1467 is good recycling policy, similar to laws already enacted in California and soon to be Washington and the European Union. Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for your support of LD 1467. I’ll be happy to answer any questions that you have.