



**Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition
In Support of LD 1541
An Act To Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs
and Save Taxpayer Money
Before the Committee On Environment and Natural Resources
May 10, 2021**

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and members of the Committee On Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Beth Ahearn and I am testifying on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) in support of LD 1541 “An Act To Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayer Money”. The EPC is a partnership of thirty-two conservation, environmental, and public health organizations. You can find the list of organizations at the bottom of this testimony. We represent over 120,000 members in Maine and work together to protect the good health, good jobs, and way of life that our environment provides. This year, LD 1541 is one of ten priority bills that are part of the EPC’s shared legislative agenda.

Our recycling system is broken. Until recently, most of us thought that what we put in our recycling bins was recycled into new packaging and products. In reality, U.S. recyclers were pulling out the valuable materials and shipping the rest elsewhere - mostly to China and other South Asian countries. About 1/3 of the materials that the U.S. was counting as recycled were shipped to these countries and, as we’d later find out, most were actually dumped or burned. A few years ago, those countries stopped accepting these materials because of the human health hazards they created. This left U.S. recyclers to deal with huge amounts of materials that are not technically or economically recyclable - mostly low-grade plastics. This has increased costs for recyclers and they’ve passed those costs onto municipalities.

Because of this, Maine’s recycling programs are struggling to survive. [Many municipalities have been forced to scale back or eliminate their recycling programs.](#) Mainers want to do the right thing for the environment by recycling but are increasingly frustrated by the lack of access and confusion about what is recyclable. Maine taxpayers must also unfairly cover 100% of the cost

of recycling - an estimated \$16-\$17.5 million each year. The large corporations that are flooding Maine with low-value plastic packaging pay nothing for the growing volume of waste they create, so they have no incentive to design less wasteful packaging or to ensure that packaging can be recycled.

We need less packaging, more reusable packaging, and packaging that can be easily and economically recycled. Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging is a proven solution that can help incentivize these shifts and help save Maine's recycling programs. [Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\) for Packaging has been successfully implemented in 47 jurisdictions worldwide since the 1980s including several provinces in Canada.](#) EPR for packaging has a proven record of reducing taxpayer costs, increasing recycling rates well above 50%, expanding local infrastructure investments, and creating jobs. Under EPR for Packaging, large corporations like Amazon and Walmart pay their fair share by helping to finance recycling programs. Importantly, Maine's small businesses and manufacturers will be exempted from participating. EPR for Packaging will help Maine finally reach its long-established 50% recycling goal, which would reduce as much carbon pollution as taking 166,000 cars off the road.

Maine is not alone in pursuing this exciting solution. Currently, 10 other states are pursuing EPR for packaging as well, and the federal Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act includes EPR for packaging, too.

The Environmental Priorities Coalition strongly supports LD 1541 and urges you to unanimously support this legislation.

Conversely, we oppose LD 1471. If enacted, LD 1471 could actually increase waste and further harm our recycling system. This bill would not guarantee meaningful assistance to Maine's municipalities; would not provide any incentive for producers to create less or better packaging; does not protect Maine's small businesses; proposes a highly problematic governance structure for a packaging stewardship program that would not work for Maine; and has other problematic components. We urge the Committee to reject this bill outright.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and I am happy to answer any questions. The list of EPC organizations are attached.

Environmental Priorities Coalition

Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition is a partnership of 32 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations representing over 100,000 members who want to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that our environment provides.

We are counting on Maine policymakers to take the important steps needed to protect Maine's extraordinary environment so Maine people and Maine communities can thrive.

