

May 6, 2021

Sen. Stacy Brenner
Rep. Ralph Tucker
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Cross Building, Rm. 216
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Sen. Brenner, Rep. Tucker, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

We regret that we are unable to attend the hearing for LD 1541 via Zoom and greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the Act to Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayer Money.

We are members of the Materials Management Research Group at the University of Maine's Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions. Our group, made up of faculty and students from a wide range of disciplines, is focused on identifying sustainable materials management solutions in the state of Maine. We draw on our interdisciplinary academic expertise, as well as a series of stakeholder meetings with materials management professionals, local officials, and industry leaders to understand both the challenges and potential solutions for materials management in Maine. In 2015 our team conducted stakeholder engagement meetings with over 130 individuals, representing more than 90 entities in the state. We also conducted a survey of nearly 200 stakeholders to assess support for a wide range of waste policies and wrote a review of waste reduction policies in other states. The results of this work were presented to this committee in 2016 and are available on our website.

We are happy to convey a number of important insights from this work that are pertinent to this specific legislation:

Potential Economic Impacts

- Our work with stakeholders indicates that waste management is typically one of the top five expenses for municipalities in Maine. Municipal leaders described having limited control over the amount and type of product packaging they receive, yet they are solely responsible for managing it through disposal or recycling.
- Recent changes to international recycling markets as a result of China's National Sword policy mean that recycling has shifted from an income-generator for many towns to an expensive burden.

Effectiveness of EPR

- Product stewardship and extended producer responsibility works. Research has demonstrated that Maine's existing product stewardship legislation for e-waste resulted in a 221% increase in the number of e-waste items collected and recycled by its third year.
- Research in other contexts has shown that extended producer responsibility programs can affect design and planning decisions that favor recyclability and disassembly, reducing the amount of waste generated at the source. This aligns with Maine's solid waste hierarchy, which prioritizes source reduction above all other strategies.

Past & Future of Materials Management in Maine

- Maine has long been a leader in materials management, as one of the first states to enact a bottle bill and stewardship programs for mercury and batteries. Our stakeholders expressed a strong pride in Maine's leadership on materials management issues. LD 1541 would allow Maine to learn from existing successful programs internationally while leading the way in the United States.
- In each of the six meetings we conducted across the state – including rural and urban communities in northern, southern, central, and western Maine – stakeholders expressed a desire for materials management systems that shift toward manufacturer responsibility and better or less packaging.

Kind regards,

Brienne Berry, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology - University of Maine, Orono

Cindy Isenhour, PhD, Department of Anthropology, Climate Change Institute - University of Maine, Orono

Travis Blackmer, School of Economics - University of Maine, Orono

Jean MacRae, PhD, Civil and Environmental Engineering - University of Maine, Orono

These comments reflect our views and expertise and do not speak on behalf of the university.