



Testimony of Vanessa Berry, Environmental Educator, **ecomaine**

Before the Environment & Natural Resources Committee

In support of LD 1541

An Act To Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save  
Taxpayer Money

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation. My name is Vanessa Berry, and I am an Environmental Educator at ecomaine. We are a quasi-municipal organization with more than 70 member communities in Maine. We own and operate Maine's largest recycling plant, a food waste recovery program, a waste-to-energy facility and a landfill. Our mission statement describes us best:**

**ecomaine provides comprehensive long-term solid waste solutions in a safe, environmentally responsible, economically sound manner, and is a leader in raising public awareness of sustainable waste management strategies.**

**ecomaine closely adheres to the solid waste management hierarchy in our business decisions and our outreach, as guided by State of Maine statute and the Environmental Protection Agency. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. Compost and Digestion. Waste-to-Energy. And Landfilling as a last resort.**

**We support LD 1541, as it provides necessary guidance that aligns with the solid waste management hierarchy and promotes strategies for recovering Maine's product packaging that will strengthen Maine's existing recycling systems and establish a more circular economy.**

**My role as an Environmental Educator for ecomaine allows me to provide free direct education and best practices on disposal of waste materials to Maine residents, businesses, organizations, schools, and**

others. In doing this work, I know that many Maine residents rely on our team to find recycling solutions for the ever-evolving packaging waste they receive each day. We see their confusion as they navigate the dozens of mail-back, retail drop-off and other recovery programs in addition to their municipal single-stream services. We hear their frustrations when their municipality abandons their recycling program, or does not accept recyclables that are taken in other parts of the state.

Without a shared producer responsibility, our role in providing this public education grows only more challenging as packaging evolves into materials that are simply not readily recyclable.

But LD 1541 will allow for packaging material to transition from the difficult-to-recycle to *readily recyclable*, driving up recycling rates in Maine while lowering processing costs and diverting more waste from Maine's landfills. This legislation will have a powerful impact by creating new opportunities for producers and recycling facilities like ecomaine to work together to design packaging more deliberately, to ensure that it is readily recyclable for all Maine residents.

The issue of access and convenience are of utmost importance to ecomaine; while we support this legislation, we must stress our request that any alternative programs to be developed should not negatively impact existing recycling programs, which have been shown to be the most consistent method for Maine residents. Additionally, we would note the increased carbon footprint that can

**often result through inconvenient take-back programs that ask consumers to individually assume the responsibility of recycling.**

**However, with these noted, ecomaine is pleased to support LD 1541 and efforts to promote the solid waste hierarchy and waste diversion in Maine. Thank you again for this opportunity.**