

Testimony in Support of LD 1541: An Act to Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayer Money

350 Downeast and EcoSattvas Downeast, located in Washington County and dedicated to working for a sustainable future for all, appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of our members in support of LD 1541, An Act to Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayers Money.

We approve LD 1541's goal to establish a stewardship program in which large producers of packaging material would be required to participate in order to sell or distribute products for use in Maine. A state-wide policy solution is necessary to solve the problem of recycling in Maine where recycling programs are hanging by a thread because it has become cheaper to dispose of products than to recycle. The producers of packaging material play an important role in being good stewards of the environment.

Maine was among the first states to pass a bottle bill, the first to pass an electronics recycling law and the first to ban polystyrene foam. This year, we have the opportunity to lead the nation once again by passing LD 1541. Product stewardship is the future for a sustainable Maine.

It is a given that packaging materials made from non-recyclable or difficult and expensive to recycle materials will not be recycled. Constant changes in plastic packaging material have been extremely challenging for the recycling industry and frustrating to the consumer. Few to no markets exist for much packaging. LD 1541 incentivizes manufacturers to consider the disposal of packaging materials in designing, marketing, and distributing their products.

Before the predecessor to LD 1541 died in the last legislative session due to the pandemic shut-down, our members hosted a presentation in Machias on recycling reform. More than 25 people attended the presentation, expressing their frustration over not knowing what is happening to their recycling and the increasing cost of recycling borne by municipalities and therefore, taxpayers. Representatives from the Pleasant River solid waste disposal district covering six towns Downeast were concerned about towns withdrawing from the district on account of rising costs and the burden that places on the remaining towns. Other attendees highlighted the difficulty of getting haulers to transport recycling for Downeast towns and cities. People expressed their feeling that Downeast has been treated unfairly by a system in which the more affluent communities of southern Maine have better recycling programs than those of Downeast.

We believe that LD 1541 will address the frustrations and inequities faced by the residents of Washington County. Moreover, in incentivizing the producers of packaging to design better, more easily recyclable products, LD 1541 has the potential to reduce the plastic waste that is ubiquitous in our otherwise pristine coastal and forest areas on which we depend for tourism dollars and livelihoods.

We believe the statewide recycling education programs, and the requirements for identifying what types of packaging are contributing to litter rather than being recycled, included in LD 1541, will serve to change people's habits and convert people to becoming stewards of the precious land and water that surround us for its long-term sustainability.

While the container manufacturers and others who profit from our broken recycling system will argue that enacting LD 1541 will increase the cost of goods sold in Maine, we point out that successful recycling programs are currently in effect in all 28 European Union member states and in Brazil and in five provinces in Canada. Why should Maine bear the burden of recycling costs that these manufacturers assume in other jurisdictions?

What is happening to our recycling? Where is it going? Why do costs keep increasing for municipalities and taxpayers? Why is it so hard to get haulers to transport recycling for Downeast towns and cities? Why are we paying the cost instead of the container manufacturers? These are the frustrations with Maine's recycling system expressed by the citizens of Washington County that LD 1541 will address and why we urge your support of this ground-breaking legislation.

*Mark Brown
28 Church Lane
Marshfield, ME 04654
350 Downeast*

*Diane Fitzgerald
9 Cottons Knoll
Hiram, ME 04041
EcoSattvas DownEast*