

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

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We are writing in support of LD 1541, *An Act to Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayer Money*. An EPR for Packaging law would shift the cost of managing packaging waste materials from Maine's municipal taxpayers to the producers of the packaging. It would hold large multinational companies accountable for the waste that they create, and there would be an incentive for packaging manufacturers to produce less wasteful and more recyclable packaging thereby contributing to a circular economy.

Communities across Maine are struggling with the costs of recycling. This bill would reimburse municipalities for recycling and disposal of single-use packaging waste that accounts for 30-40% of household waste. Municipalities would keep any revenue from the sale of recyclables, and would be reimbursed if their costs exceeded their revenue. The stewardship organization would dispense additional funds to be used for education around recycling and for building out recycling infrastructure.

This bill would help Maine reach its long established 50% recycling goal that was set in 1989. Recent estimates have shown that Maine's recycling rate is around 30%. Many of the over 40 countries around the world where EPR for Packaging programs have been implemented have increased their recycling rates to well above 50%. Belgium has had an EPR program in place for more than 25 years and has a recycling rate of 80%. Neighboring Quebec's EPR program established in 2005 has a recycling rate over 63%.

In the United States, Maine has been in the forefront of other successful product stewardship laws including paint, fluorescent light bulbs, electronic waste, rechargeable batteries, cell phones, mercury thermostats, and the long term bottle bill that was implemented in the 1970's. Other northeastern states recently

have been in the process of drafting packaging EPR legislation including New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont as well as six other states across the country. A federally introduced bill, *Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act*, includes EPR for packaging. It has been suggested that passage of a state EPR bill could be the impetus for passage of a federal bill.

York environmental activists have noticed that single-use plastic packaging has proliferated. To-go convenience packaging that is “not acceptable” in our single stream recycling has increased. Efforts to engage retailers in reducing this type of packaging has met with resistance. Consumers assume that the increase in single-use plastic is a result of retailers’ interest in protecting consumers from Covid, but we know that plastic is a product of fossil fuel and that the plastic industry is finding new ways to maintain and even expand the demand for plastic.

Adding to this proliferation of single-use plastic is that virgin plastic is cheaper for producers to use than post-consumer plastic resins. Producers are using more and more plastic in their packaging that can’t be recycled. Globally less than 9% of plastics generated are recycled, and single-use plastics account for 40 percent of the plastic produced every year. The vast majority of plastics ends up in landfills, incinerators, or in the oceans and waterways where it breaks down into microplastics and ultimately ends up in the fish that we eat and the water that we drink.

EPR for Packaging would provide incentives for producers to design plastic packaging that is more recyclable and to reduce unnecessary plastic packaging. Voluntary efforts by industry to assist in dealing with plastic packaging wastes in Maine have not been effective. Plastic producers have been given a free pass for too long to pollute our communities with single-use plastics that aren’t recyclable at taxpayer’s expense. It is going to take laws and rules to force the industry to change, and EPR laws are a proven solution that have been used successfully around the world.

For these reasons we urge passage of LD 1541.