



CITY OF PORTLAND
Sustainability Office
Troy Moon
Sustainability Director

To: Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee

From: Troy Moon, Sustainability Director

Date: May 10, 2021

Regarding: City of Portland, Maine testimony to the State of Maine 129th Legislature's JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES in support of LD 1541, *"An Act To Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayer Money."*

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the City of Portland in support of LD 1541 *"An Act To Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayer Money."*

Like most municipalities in Maine, the City of Portland spends a significant amount of money each year to collect, process, recycle, and dispose of consumer goods residents no longer need or want. In our case, City employees provide a weekly collection of trash and recyclables at the curb. Operating our fleet of collection vehicles and paying our employees costs approximately \$2.5 million annually. Our disposal cost for trash at ecomaine is about \$700,000 per year. Historically, our tipping fee for recyclables was \$0.

In 2019, the ongoing crisis in recycling markets forced ecomaine to begin charging its owner communities a recycling tipping fee. Contract and associate members began paying the recycling tipping fee in 2018. Portland has seen an additional cost of about \$200,000 per year. Some communities have seen tipping fees for recyclables exceed \$100 per ton, which has challenged their budgets and forced them to pare down or eliminate their recycling programs.

The City of Portland has a long commitment to recycling and sees it as an essential part of our waste management strategy. We started our curbside collection and pay as you throw (PAYT) program in 1999. Since that time, we have reduced the amount of trash delivered to the ecomaine's waste to energy facility by more than 60% -- from over 23,000 tons to under 10,000 tons per year. We have increased our recycling tonnage from less than 1,000 tons per year to

nearly 6,000 tons per year. Although we are proud of this effort, we will need to do much more. Our climate action plan calls for us to be a zero waste community by 2050.

We believe companies that sell consumer goods should help Portland and other Maine communities achieve their waste management goals by participating in the end of life costs of their products. Right now, they have no incentive to make their products recyclable, make them durable, or to limit the amount of packaging used to contain and ship them. These private companies rely on property tax payers in cities and towns across Maine to pick up the cost, whatever it may be, to collect, recycle, or dispose of their products. LD 1541 would provide consumer goods companies with a financial incentive to reduce packaging and to make their products more readily recyclable or reusable.

This would help Maine some very important ways:

1. Make progress toward Maine's goal to recycle 50% of its waste

Maine's recycling rate has remained stagnant for many years and we have failed to reach our stated goal to recycle 50% of the waste produced in the state. Less packaging and more readily recyclable consumer goods will help move the needle.

2. Provide financial relief for Maine municipalities

As things stand, Maine's property taxpayers subsidize the largest and most successful companies in the world by paying to dispose of or recycle unwanted consumer goods. Waste disposal is a large portion of every municipal budget. Financial contributions from industry to assist with this cost would free up money for other vital services and allow greater expenditures on waste reduction efforts.

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws are not new. Most industrialized countries in the world have adopted them because they are successful. According to the Product Stewardship Institute, European countries with EPR have recovery rates for paper packaging that exceed 70%. Maine has been a leader in the United States by enacting EPR or Product Stewardship laws for a variety of products including electronics, cell phones, and paint. Maine should continue this leadership by adopting an EPR law for packaging. For this reason, we urge passage of LD 1541.