



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of  
LD 1639: An Act To Protect the Health and Welfare of Maine Communities and Reduce Harmful Solid  
Waste**

Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
Room 216, Cross State Office Building  
Monday, May 17, 2021

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. MPHA supports LD 1639: “An Act To Protect the Health and Welfare of Maine Communities and Reduce Harmful Solid Waste.”

MPHA is the state’s oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 500 individual members and 30 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine’s communities and we take that responsibility seriously.

This bill ensures waste facilities cannot send more out-of-state waste to Juniper Ridge Landfill than what they generate from within the state. It also prohibits landfills from counting waste as recycling. Currently, placement of waste in a landfill can count toward the 50% recycling standard that a solid waste processing facility must meet. Lastly, the bill adds environmental justice to the public benefit determination standards for solid waste disposal facilities. This would ensure that environmental justice is taken into consideration for the expansion and licensing of state-owned landfills, giving communities most impacted a greater say in the decision-making process. While Maine cannot legally restrict commercial waste facilities from importing out-of-state waste due to federal law, we can prevent out-of-state waste from being dumped in our state-owned waste facilities.

Landfills can produce objectionable odors and landfill gas can move through soil and collect in nearby buildings. Of the gases produced in landfills, ammonia, sulfides, methane, and carbon dioxide are of most concern. Ammonia and hydrogen sulfide are responsible for most of the odors at landfills. Methane, a flammable gas, and carbon dioxide can also be emitted and collected in nearby buildings, displacing oxygen.<sup>1</sup> The health impacts for populations living in proximity to landfills are well-documented, and include risk of adverse health effects, such as low birth weight, birth defects, and certain types of cancers;<sup>2</sup> in the short term, other adverse health effects include eye, throat and lung irritation, nausea, headache, nasal blockage, sleeping difficulties, weight loss, chest pain, and aggravation of asthma.<sup>1</sup>

One recent (2019) study showed that 78% of participants living closer to a landfill site indicated serious contamination of air quality evident from bad odors linked to the landfill site. Illnesses such as flu, eye irritation

and weakness of the body were frequently reported by participants living closer to the landfill than those living far from the landfill. More than half of the participants (56%) living closer to the landfill indicated fear of their health in the future. Thus, the participants living closer to the landfill site were less satisfied with the location of their community with respect to the landfill, than those living far from the landfill site.<sup>3</sup>

This legislation will improve public health, health equity and environmental justice. Therefore, we respectfully ask you to vote LD 1639 “Ought to Pass.” Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup>New York State Department of Health. [Important things to know about landfill gas](#). October 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Vrijheid M. Health effects of residence near hazardous waste landfill sites: A review of epidemiologic literature. *Environ Health Perspect* 108(suppl 1):101-112 (2000).

<sup>3</sup>Njoku PO, Edokpayi JN, Odiyo JO. Health and environmental risks of residents living close to a landfill: A case study of Thohoyandou landfill, Limpopo Province, South Africa. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2019;16(12):2125.