



DATE: May 3, 2023
TO: Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Director of Government & Community Relations
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RE: **LD 1418, An Act Concerning Single-use Disposable Water Bottles and Water Refill Stations**

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources: I am writing today on behalf of the University of Maine System (UMS) to inform your consideration of LD 1418, *An Act Concerning Single-use Disposable Water Bottles and Water Refill Stations*.

Maine's public universities are committed to stewardship of our state's natural resources and to reducing the environmental footprint of our campuses. Last year, UMS Trustees committed to divesting from fossil fuels, which followed a reduction in our own universities' carbon emissions by more than one-third over the past 15 years through efficiency upgrades and transitioning from heating oil to lower-carbon alternatives. We are proud that our R1 flagship, the University of Maine, is a global leader in climate science and cutting-edge research and development to advance biobased materials, including for food and beverage packaging.

Across our campuses, water filling stations are readily accessible and their use is highly encouraged. However, bottled water is still sold in university vending machines and dining/retail locations, which are operated by contracted third-party vendors. Additionally, at some campus events, bottled water is provided as bulk distribution of water in cups would be impractical.

We are concerned that as proposed, LD 1418 could have unintended consequences for our campus communities. Specifically, banning bottled water sales could spur increased consumption of other less healthy beverages, like sugary soda. That was the finding at the University of Vermont (UVM), where a student campaign led to a prohibition on bottled water sales on campus and use of single-serving bottles actually increased, [according to research published in the peer-reviewed American Journal of Public Health](#).

Additionally, this Committee should be aware that consistent with federal law, State law requires that blind and visually impaired individuals be given preference in the establishment and operation of vending facilities in public buildings, and if that is not feasible, that a portion of income from vending operations in public buildings be directed to the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) within the Maine Department of Labor. UMS estimates that we remit about \$2,200 in revenue from campus vending bottled water sales each year to the BEP.

Given UVM's experience, we are unsure if LD 1418 would result in reduced vending sales on public university campuses and in other public buildings, and thus, less funding for the BEP's activities to broaden economic opportunities for blind residents of Maine. We encourage the Committee to consult with Maine DOL as part of its consideration of this legislation.

UMS appreciates the intent of this bill and share its supporters' commitment to reducing plastic pollution. Please let me know if I can provide additional information for your work session about the potential impact of LD 1418 on Maine's public universities.