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LD 295

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and honorable members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Maya Faulstich, I am a resident of Yarmouth Maine, and a student activist with Maine Youth Action. I am writing to support LD 205, An Act to Ensure Accurate Recyclability Labeling for Plastic Containers and Plastic Packaging Material.

In my family and my high school, I'm known as the "plastic girl". If someone has a question about plastics, they ask me. One question I get asked ALL the time, probably at least once a week, is: "Can this be recycled?" People ask about coffee cups: no they can't be recycled, because of the plastic liner inside the paper. Plastic shopping bags? No, because they jam the machines. What about those black plastic take-out boxes? No, black plastic isn't recyclable because recycling technology can't detect the dark color. What about a styrofoam cup? No, the fact that there's virtually no market for it is one of many reasons why styrofoam is ALSO not recyclable. So if all these things can almost never be recycled, what's with these little symbols? With chasing arrows, and numbers? Let's face it: people are confused. These numbers are there to make us confused. They're printed on the packaging to make us believe that it's "green" and "sustainable" to buy this plastic-packaged product because it will just be recycled. Like magic. As much as we may want it to be, that's not the case. These symbols are meaningless. Much of our plastic packaging is labeled as recyclable when it actually isn't. Due to inaccurate labeling, consumers are putting plastic packaging into recycling bins that cannot be recycled. That's why 46% of plastic ends up in the landfill with only 9% of plastics getting recycled. We end up with contaminated recycling bins, more trash, and consumers and citizens who are being misled. We need to change this broken system.

LD 295 would prohibit manufacturers from labeling items as recyclable if they cannot actually be recycled. It would define recyclability as something that is actively recycled in the state of Maine, not just a theoretical, and only allow the "chasing-arrows" symbol on materials with a 75% or higher recycling rate in Maine. To determine what is being actively recycled in Maine, the DEP will conduct a study of all Material Recycling Facilities in Maine. After the study is done, only packaging that is recycled throughout most of Maine will be labeled as recyclable.

This bill would also ensure that plastic that goes to recycling won't contain intentionally added metals or chemicals of concern identified by the DEP. Over 13,000 chemicals are known to be involved in the production of plastic, and these chemical additives can leach into our food and drink. Exposure to chemicals during the manufacturing of plastics and leaching of those chemicals into food packaging are linked with severe health impacts such as endocrine disruption, reproductive toxicity, and increases in certain types of cancers. Yikes. I do not want to be buying packaging that could give me cancer and mess with my reproductive system, especially at 16 years old!

If this bill passes, the "chasing arrows" symbol will have some actual meaning. Brands might be encouraged to improve their packaging, and make it actually recyclable, instead of tricking consumers into believing that their packaging is going to be recycled, when it won't be. Heading to the store, we will be able to make more informed decisions about what we buy and easily assess whether or not it will be recycled. And we'll know that if it's recyclable, it won't have dangerous chemicals that could hurt us.

And hopefully, I'll get fewer people asking me: "Can this be recycled?" Because the symbol will finally be telling the truth!