

Maya Faulstich
Maine Youth Action
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 I am representing Maine Youth Action, an organization that works with hundreds of young Mainers on promoting a bold and ambitious climate action agenda for our state. Our testimony today is in support of LD 295.

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, 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, because recycling technology can't detect the black color. What about a styrofoam cup? No, there's virtually no market for it. So if all these things can almost never be recycled, they ask, what is with these little chasing arrows symbols? It is apparent: the public is confused. What is most unfortunate is that these numbers are intentionally misleading. They are printed on the packaging to convince the public that it is "green" or "sustainable" to buy their product since it is perceivably recyclable. Although we may wish for these symbols to hold some meaning, that is not the case. These symbols manufactured by corporations are meaningless, and are only intended to be a marketing scheme rather than informational recycling labels. Consequently, proactive individuals are dutifully putting plastic in recycling bins when in fact it won't be recycled. That's why 46% of plastic ends up in the landfill with only 9% getting recycled. The recycling system is broken and requires measures from proactive lawmakers like yourselves to rectify these flaws.

LD 295 would prohibit manufacturers from using misleading recycling labels, a common sense and helpful measure for consumers. It would also define recyclability as something that is actively recycled in the state of Maine, not just a theoretical. 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, the state will only allow the "chasing-arrows" symbol on materials with a 75% or higher recycling rate in Maine.

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 these chemicals is 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 recyclable, instead of greenwashing consumers. 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!

Sincerely,
Maya Faulstich