

**Testimony in Support of LD 1793,
An Act to Improve Management and Reduce the Volume of Solid Waste**

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Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Vanessa Berry. I am the Sustainable Maine Program Manager for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1793.

Last year, the Maine Climate Council established a temporary Materials Management Task Force (MMTF) to examine climate-related issues in solid waste management. This group brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including compost facility operators, wastewater treatment plant managers, large retailers, nonprofit organizations, and agency staff.

One of the most valuable outcomes of the MMTF was the creation of a network of partners committed to solving Maine's solid waste challenges. In a "home rule" state with wide demographic and geographic diversity, opportunities for such cross-sector collaboration are rare. The MMTF provided a much-needed space for open dialogue and joint problem-solving among stakeholders with a shared goal.

NRCM was fortunate to participate in those discussions, which covered complex topics such as efficient hauling of materials, expanding recovery opportunities in rural areas, and reducing wasted food.

A consistent theme that emerged was the urgent need for regional partnerships. Stakeholders recognized that investing in regional assets could lower operating costs for individual communities and help towns work together to achieve economies of scale. Currently, rural and less populated areas face significant barriers to accessing waste diversion alternatives like recycling and composting. Regional collaboration offers a pathway to overcome cost and logistical challenges and to establish infrastructure that would be unattainable for many towns on their own.

LD 1793 proposes several critical steps to support more sustainable waste management practices in Maine:

1. **Create an Official Task Force for Materials Management** – This would allow key stakeholders to meet regularly to identify critical issues and propose policy solutions on a biennial basis.
2. **Promote Community Engagement** – Facilities would be required to solicit and respond to community input during new or revised licensing processes.
3. **Increase Transparency from Waste Facility Operators** – Licensed facilities would report annually on the origin, volume, and disposition of the waste they process.

4. **Finance Regional Projects** – Maine’s Solid Waste Diversion Grant Program would be expanded to fund regional collaboration projects between towns.
5. **Implement a Pilot Program** – The DEP would develop a pilot program to evaluate innovative solid waste management solutions, including testing new diversion strategies and cost-saving measures.

LD 1793 provides an opportunity for the Legislature to drive meaningful, structural changes to Maine’s waste management system. By encouraging greater collaboration among communities, facilities, and regional planning offices, this bill supports solutions identified by the MMTF and will help advance resource recovery across the state – not just in urban centers, but also in rural areas that can greatly benefit from investment and resource-sharing.

We recognize that budgets and staff capacity for state departments and municipalities are tight, and assigning additional responsibilities to the Department of Environmental Protection at this time may be challenging. However, we urge the Committee to consider many of the components of this bill and move forward with a proposal that fosters regional coordination, strengthens local engagement, and promotes greater transparency within Maine’s materials management sector.

Thank you for considering our comments. I would be happy to answer any questions for this Committee now and in advance of the work session.