



Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
% Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

March 1, 2023

RE: LD 425, An Act to Lower the Environmental Impact of Consumers, Increase Food Safety and Strengthen Consumer Choice by Ending the Ban on Single-use Plastic Shopping Bags & LD 572, An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores

Dear Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to LD 425, An Act to Lower the Environmental Impact of Consumers, Increase Food Safety and Strengthen Consumer Choice by Ending the Ban on Single-use Plastic Shopping Bags, and LD 572, An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores, on behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members and supporters.

Maine Audubon opposes these bills because they would weaken or repeal Maine's nation-leading, strong plastic bag policy, which is a vital strategy (among many other strategies) to reduce plastic pollution.

Plastic pollution causes significant harm to wildlife, especially seabirds. Scientists have been tracking plastic ingestion by seabirds for decades. In 1960, plastic was found in the stomachs of fewer than five percent of birds and by 1980 that number had jumped to 80 percent. Plastic found inside birds includes bags, bottle caps, synthetic fibers from clothing, and "microplastics"—plastic that has been broken down by the sun and waves over time.

Scientists are still unearthing the far-ranging damages of accumulating microplastics in wildlife. A recently published study demonstrated how microplastics in fish changed their behavior. The study demonstrated that, compared to controls, fish treated by microplastics had weakened feeding activity. Microplastic treated-fish had reduced swimming speed and range of movement, demonstrating that microplastics could have negative effects on hunting behavior. Furthermore, microplastics accumulate in the gills and intestine of the fish, causing significant changes to the gallbladder and liver, leading to lower growth, protein, and lipid contents. Fish are

eaten by birds, other wildlife, and humans, meaning that the known impacts of microplastic ingestion is not isolated to fish.

Other work has established reduced foraging, survival, and reproduction as a result of microplastics in marine zooplankton, an organism that is the foundation of marine ecosystems. Researchers have also documented that plastic loads in seabird chicks translate to poorer body condition, making them more susceptible to disease and/or predation. Undoubtedly, microplastics are ubiquitous, and their impacts on people, fish, and wildlife, and the environment are endless.

Wildlife ingest far more than microplastics. Wildlife such as sea turtles and whales often mistake plastic bags for jellyfish, a primary food source. Once ingested, plastic bags cannot be digested or passed by these animals. This can prevent food digestion and can lead to a very slow and painful death. Marine life can also become entangled in plastic bags, causing suffocation, starvation, drowning, exhaustion, infection, and increased vulnerability to predators.

Scientists say that by 2050, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish, ton for ton. Globally, about 1 million plastic shopping bags are distributed per minute and only 1% are recycled. We urge the Committee to oppose LD 425 and LD 572, because both bills would be a step backward in progress toward confronting Maine's, our nation's, and the world's plastic problem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eliza Donoghue". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eliza Donoghue, Esq.  
Director of Advocacy