

LD: 1769: An Act to Strengthen Maine's Purchasing Code of Conduct

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am Joyce Schelling from Orland, Maine and I appreciate this opportunity to come before you to testify in favor of LD: 1769. I was one of the business members on the Committee that researched and drafted the bill, which created Maine's current Purchasing Code of Conduct. What I learned on that Committee made a great impression upon me, enough so, that I joined the Maine Clean Clothes Alliance, and continued to meet with the Department of Purchasing after the law was passed. Being part of those meetings have made me even prouder of being a Mainer. I have only deep respect for the people who work for the Department and for those who advise them. It is from those meetings and the situations confronting the Department that I feel strongly that this bill is needed to ensure that our Code of Conduct is enforceable and supports the Department's best efforts.

Our leadership has paid off as many government entities have followed Maine's lead. As more and more purchasing bodies insist that factories involved in making shoes and clothing meet fundamental health, safety and human rights standards, we all gain. I have found that knowing we have the potential to impact the lives of people who lives so very far from here and in such different circumstances to be humbling and exciting. It is not often that our work can have such impact. I have also found that knowing how important it is to level this field for our businesses at home to be galvanizing. I don't want our local businesses to lower wages and environmental standards to be able to compete against companies that gain an unfair advantage by doing just that.

It is time for the next step: to ensure that what companies say they do is what they actually do.

This bill gives the Division of Purchases the tools it needs to make the existing law work better. The independent monitoring provisions of this bill provide the Department with facts that are not tainted by a conflict of interest. This should simplify the Department's work.

The newly established procedure for workers and human rights organizations to file complaints with the State Division of Purchases when they believe a contractor is violating workers' rights will help balance the public relations arm of a company.

The clear penalties, including the suspension of a contract and the barring of a company from bidding for future contracts, provide a way for the Department to enforce the Code.

As a member of Maine Businesses for Social Responsibility and as a distributor of 100% post-consumer, processed chlorine free paper, I know how important it is to grow the market for companies that are choosing to be responsible, since businesses understand incentives. A growing market is a large incentive. These are not onerous restrictions. As a small supplier of processed chlorine free paper, I was able to get information from the technical departments of the mills, so that I could satisfy my customers who would only purchase processed chlorine free paper. The mills understood that supplying me with this information helped build my market and therefore their market. At first this paper was only available from a Canadian mill. Now there are US firms making this paper and Boise Cascade is the most recent company to convert a mill to this manufacturing process.

Maine's Code of Conduct is proving invaluable to help tip the balance toward a more socially responsible global economic climate. This will not only help people in far away countries; it will also help us here at home as we try to compete.

I urge you to vote for LD 1769. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

**Joyce K. Schelling
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