



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

Responding to the cry of the Earth
and the cry of the poor.

Hearing before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland General Assembly
March 5, 2024

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on
SB 642, Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program**

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based upon, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation. MCCH is a grassroots voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics—over 450 Maryland Catholics have already signed our statement of support for key environmental bills in this session of the General Assembly—but it should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

MCCH would like to express its strong support for the passage of Senate Bill 642, Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program.

We see it on our highways, byways, city streets, county roads, pastures, fields, and woods. We see it in our waterways, streams, and creeks. Discarded aluminum cans, plastic, and glass bottles are everywhere. It contaminates our soil, wastes needed resources, and—if not dumped there already—the litter eventually flows to our treasured Chesapeake Bay and then into our ocean. It is a threat to our human health and to wildlife. The plastic beverage containers break up into small pieces and are ingested by marine life, injuring and killing fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. Scientists estimate that humans are ingesting up to a credit card's worth of plastic weekly. And then there is the intangible harm. The dumping of trash reinforces the philosophy that those who are able can engage in excessive consumerism and waste resources without any regard to the effect it has on others. Something must be done.

As Maryland Catholics, when advocating for the care of our common home, we are guided by the words of Pope Francis. In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*,¹ the Pope states "Political activity on the local level could also be directed to modifying consumption, developing an economy of waste disposal and recycling." (*Laudato Si'*, no. 180) Further, "Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term." (*Laudato Si'*, no. 191). In this connection, he specifically mentions "intelligent and profitable ways of reusing, revamping, and recycling." (*Laudato Si'*, no. 192)

In his 2023 apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*,² Pope Francis observes "Efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume with prudence, are creating a new culture. The mere fact that personal,

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the following parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² The English text of this apostolic exhortation, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.

family and community habits are changing is ... helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising from deep within society” (*Laudate Deum*, no. 71).

Senate Bill 642 heeds the Pope’s cry. When enacted, it will respond to wasting resources and will create a cultural change. Some of the benefits include capturing more than 3 billion additional beverage containers annually, including 2 billion plastic bottles, thereby increasing the rate of recycling in the state from 23 percent of containers to more than 90 percent. Targeted goals for recycled products will generate an additional 11,305 tons of aluminum, 44,066 tons of PET plastic, 3,207 tons of HDPE plastic, and 140,923 tons of glass to be recycled into new containers. As a result of not having to produce new cans and bottles from virgin materials, 195,000 metric tons of CO₂-equivalent annually—the equivalent of removing the emissions of 42,000 cars—would be eliminated. Currently, the disposal costs in our landfills and incinerators are borne by taxpayers and local governments. These costs will be reduced because beverage producers would finance the costs of collection and processing of the three-quarters of beverage containers currently being disposed or littered, as well as the collection and processing of some containers currently recycled curbside. Lastly, the bottle bill will redirect investment in refillable and reusable beverage container systems and create jobs. Recycling generated by a deposit program creates five times as many jobs as landfilling or incineration.³

Senate Bill 642 gives value to not littering and could create a cultural change. Currently 10 states covering 90 million people have successful recycling programs.⁴ When consumers receive cash for empty beverage containers, there is an incentive not to litter. This incentive over time can become part of the tapestry of our culture. Like wearing seatbelts, once consumers are accustomed again to refunding empty bottle containers, personal changes will lead to cultural changes which will lead to saving natural resources and reducing litter. At one time Maryland had a bottle refund program. Now is the time to bring back the bottle bill and begin the cultural change.

For these reasons we strongly urge your support for this bill. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 642.

³ Maryland Sierra Club, “Maryland Needs a Bottle Bill! HB735/SB642” [Fact Sheet], 2024.

⁴ California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and Vermont. Redemption rates in 2019 ranged from 59 percent to 91 percent. There are currently 72 container deposit programs worldwide in 61 countries. Increased interest in the past decade has been fueled by public concern about plastic pollution. Susan Collins, “International Embrace,” *Plastics Recycling Update*, Winter 2020, pp. 38-43.