



NATIONAL AQUARIUM®

Date: March 5, 2024

Bill: SB 642 – Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction

Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **Senate Bill 642 – Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program**, which will reduce pollution, decrease costs of waste management, and increase recycling rates.

Reducing litter from beverage containers across Maryland is related to all the National Aquarium’s strategic conservation goals: saving wildlife and habitats, combatting climate change, and stopping plastic pollution. Every year about four billion beverage bottles, more than half of which are plastic, are not captured by Maryland recycling systems and are instead incinerated or left as litter in the environment. Waste incineration adds greenhouse gas emissions and harmful air pollution to the atmosphere while also disincentivizing better waste management practices including source reduction, reuse systems, recycling and composting. To make matters worse, trash incinerators are often sited in underserved and overburdened communities. This bill would lead to fewer beverage containers burned as trash, therefore supporting improved air quality and environmental justice.

Meanwhile, plastic beverage bottles left in the environment break down into smaller pieces that endanger wildlife, contaminate the global food web, and transport toxins harmful to human health. The burden and costs of mismanaged waste that becomes plastic pollution, including many beverage containers, are varied, complex and borne primarily by municipalities, communities, and taxpayers. Nationally, the U.S. spends at least \$11 billion to clean up trash that is ‘leaked’ into the environment. Closer to home, the Maryland Department of Transportation estimates expenditures of approximately \$8 million annually to remove truckloads of litter, including beverage containers, from roadways. During the past two years, the National Aquarium worked with hundreds of dedicated volunteers to pick up more than 26,000 plastic beverage containers – and ours is one of many organizations that conduct regular cleanups throughout the state. In short, many Marylanders’ time and capacity as well as millions of dollars could be better allocated when this legislation offers a proven policy solution.

Maryland should not keep kicking the proverbial can (or bottle) down the road. Refundable bottle deposit programs currently operating in ten other U.S. states have been shown to be highly effective policies that recover beverage containers and increase recycling rates while reducing litter and associated costs of mitigation. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 642.**

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