



March 4, 2024

Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program (SB 642)
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Blue Water Baltimore is a local nonprofit organization with a mission to protect and restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. **On behalf of Blue Water Baltimore, I write to express our strong support for SB 642.**

Blue Water Baltimore, home of the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, is part of the international Waterkeeper Alliance that is composed of over 350 watchdog organizations with a mission to protect and restore waterways all over the world. Our licensed Waterkeeper jurisdiction includes the entirety of the Patapsco and Back River watersheds, which means that Blue Water Baltimore is uniquely positioned among environmental NGOs in the region to focus on the health and prosperity of these waterways, and that of the people who live, work, and recreate around them.

Baltimore City is one of the few jurisdictions in the United States with a waterway listed as "impaired" under the federal Clean Water Act for trash, and an accompanying Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for trash. **This means that trash is so prevalent in the streams that flow into the Baltimore Harbor that the Harbor itself is not meeting water quality standards and that significant efforts are necessary to stop the damage and heal our waterways.** Establishing a state-wide beverage container deposit program would reduce the amount of trash that enters the waste stream in the first place, and would ultimately lead to cleaner, healthier waterways in the Baltimore region and beyond.

In my role as your Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, I routinely patrol the local streams that flow into the Patapsco and Back Rivers to monitor water quality and seek out chronic sources of pollution. **I have seen first-hand the huge rafts of plastic bottles that get trapped and restrict flow in our storm drains and urban streams, which contribute to flooding during heavy rain events.** Swaths of trash, especially plastic bottles, act as high-water marks along the Gwynns Falls trail where the stream has crested the banks. The visible trash is only a fraction of what makes its way downstream into the Baltimore Harbor, the Patapsco River, and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay.

Plastic, glass, and metal bottle trash is a blight in our streets and our streams. But what if we could turn that trash into treasure? The Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program will create a statewide deposit refund program for single use beverage containers similar to successful programs that already exist in other states. This will increase the monetary value of these bottles, which will therefore keep them out of our incinerators and landfills because people will be incentivized to recycle them properly.

This bill will result in:

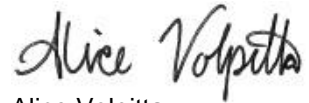
- Less trash in our streets, streams, and Harbor.
- Fewer plastic, glass, and metal bottles going to the BRESKO incinerator, which means cleaner air and less pollution in our environment.
- More space in our landfills.

Baltimore City led the charge to ban the use of Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) Foam in 2018 and that effort helped persuade State lawmakers to do the same shortly thereafter. Baltimore City and Baltimore County have joined other Maryland jurisdictions to ban single-use plastic bags from most restaurants and retail outlets, and we hope to see that change replicated on a state-wide basis soon. The next step needed to

tackle Baltimore's waterway trash problem is to establish a beverage container deposit program to reduce the number of plastic bottles that plague our shorelines; but we know that this effort cannot operate in a vacuum, and it will only be successful if it is implemented as a state-wide solution.

I am including a handful of pictures from our local waterways to show the prevalence of bottle trash in our streams and rivers (Attachments #1-5). **For all of the reasons outlined above, Blue Water Baltimore urges this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 642.**

Sincerely,



Alice Volpitta
Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
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Attachment #1
Attachment #2
Attachment #3
Attachment #4
Attachment #5

Attachment #1: Bottles and assorted trash accumulated in the Powder Mill Run. Baltimore County, MD. 3/16/2014.



Attachment #2: Bottles and assorted trash accumulated at Masonville Cove. Baltimore City, MD.
3/24/2011.



Attachment #3: Bottles and assorted trash accumulated along the banks of East Branch Herbert Run. Baltimore County, MD. 4/14/2017.



Attachment #4: Bottle trash that has accumulated as a high-water mark at Ferry Bar Park. Baltimore City, MD. 8/28/2015.



Attachment #5: Plastic and metal bottles that have accumulated along the banks of the Gwynns Falls stream. Baltimore, MD. 2/11/2024.

