

Committees: Education, Energy and the Environment
Testimony on: SB642-Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program
Submitting: Deborah A. Cohn
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 5, 2024

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering this testimony. SB642 would establish a recycling refund program for beverage containers under which customers pay a deposit when purchasing beverage bottles and receive the deposit back when returning the container to a source of sale.

Problem: About 5.2 billion beverage containers are sold each year in Maryland. Only 1.2 billion (23%) are captured for recycling. Four billion containers a year are left in the environment. Many are littered along roadsides and in waterways, with local communities having to pay to collect and dispose of them properly. I see this every time I walk or jog. Regardless of the route I take, I find beverage containers strewn in the gutter, near playing fields, and along roadways. I often come back with 8-10 discarded beverage containers. This litter would stop with a deposit/refund beverage container bill.

Solution: SB642 would establish a Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program to increase the reuse and recycling of beverage containers and reduce litter and their associated costs to local governments and Maryland's waterways. Purchasers of beverage containers would be charged a deposit which would be refundable upon return to any point of sale.

Refundable deposit bottle bills work. They significantly increase the percentage of beverage bottles that are returned for reuse. The ten states¹ with recycling refund programs have 50% less litter than other states. States with a 10-cent deposit have achieved beverage container recycling rates of 90%. Beverage bottle deposit and refund programs save counties and taxpayers money since jurisdictions do not need to collect and process littered beverage containers or fund as many litter collection programs in their streams and waterways. Any deposit fees that are never redeemed pay for the reverse vending machines and other costs of administering the program.

I first experienced the impact of modern refund/deposit bill when I visited Munich for several days. I was taking our used beverage containers to a recycling bin in a nearby park when I met a pensioner collecting beverage containers littering the park. As we spoke about what she was doing, she took me to a nearby market, showed me the reverse vending machine, demonstrated how it worked and then took the deposit slip from the vending machine to collect cash from the check-out counter. People on a limited income will be motivated to return strewn beverage containers on which they did not pay the deposit fee.

¹ CA, CT, HI, IA, ME, MA, MI, NY, OR, VT.

For these reasons I urge the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report for this sensible bill – SB642.

Thank you.

Deborah A. Cohn