



## SB346 - Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program

Date: February 18, 2025

### Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

We enthusiastically support SB346. This bill would set up a recycling refund program for beverage containers. The most effective recycling programs in the United States are in states where consumers can get a refund in exchange for returning their beverage container for recycling. SB346 will bring this program to Maryland.

**Litter reduction (and the cost savings from avoided litter abatement) is a primary and unique benefit of deposit-return programs. A 2020 national litter study found states with recycling refund programs have 50% less litter than other states.<sup>1</sup>**

**In states with recycling refunds, the recycling rate for plastic bottles is 63%. States without a recycling refund program recycle only 17% of their plastic bottles on average.<sup>2</sup>**

**Bottle bill states represent 28% of the population, 47% of glass bottles and jars recycled, 51% of aluminum cans recycled, and 62% of all PET bottles recycled nationally.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Keep America Beautiful 2020 National Litter Study <https://kab.org/litter-study>

<sup>2</sup> National Stewardship Action Foundation and Eunomia State of the States Report 2021

<sup>3</sup> The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of Containers and Packaging Recycling Rates 2021

**The ten US states with recycling refund programs produce cleaner material streams and supply more than 50% of glass cullet the glass container industry can use.<sup>4</sup>**

**Environmental benefits are maximized when well-designed beverage container recycling refunds are paired with extended producer responsibility for other packaging materials.<sup>5</sup>**

That's how effective these programs are. This is a tried and true policy that will significantly reduce the estimated 40-60% of trash and litter composed of beverage containers in our streets, neighborhoods, and waterways.

By contrast, where we stand now has taxpayers funding significant costs associated with litter. Here are just a few small examples. According to MDOT, the SHA alone spends nearly \$8M annually to remove approximately 5,300 truckloads of litter. According to the agency "that's more than 27,000 truckloads and nearly \$40 million" every 5 years. Maryland local governments each fund litter cleanup programs. Trash Free Maryland knows of hundreds of cleanups across Maryland conducted by thousands of volunteers annually. There are thousands more conducted by residents in their communities. Perhaps the largest cost is that to our society. Health professionals tell us children who grow up in communities with litter are less likely to have successful outcomes. Littered plastic containers can break down in the environment into microplastics. Recent studies suggest levels of microplastics are increasing in human brains. Litter affects us all.

All of these costs are avoidable! There are better ways and this bill brings one of the most effective ways to reduce litter to Maryland.

We also note recycling refund programs for beverage containers can go hand in hand with legislation to adopt producer responsibility for packaging. Well designed producer responsibility programs can help us *reduce* our volume of waste, while modern recycling refund programs help us *reuse* and *recycle* a major portion of the packaging waste stream. Recycling refund programs help capture highly recyclable beverage containers that might otherwise be wasted or littered to satisfy high demand for high quality recycled materials.

Marylanders take great pride in our recycling efforts and are fed up with litter and concerned about health impacts from plastics in the environment. Modern recycling refund programs are proven policy winners that are effective, equitable, and supported by the general public. We look forward to working with you on this exciting and highly impactful policy. We respectfully urge your favorable consideration.

Contact: Kelly Doordan, Trash Free Maryland ([kelly@trashfreemaryland.org](mailto:kelly@trashfreemaryland.org))

Trash Free Maryland

Blue Water Baltimore

Institute for Local Self-Reliance

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<sup>4</sup> Glass Packaging Institute 2024

<sup>5</sup> Eunomia: The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of US Packaging Recycling Rates 2023  
<https://eunomia.eco/the-50-states-of-recycling-a-state-by-state-assessment-of-us-packaging-recycling-rates/>

Indivisible HoCoMD Environmental Action

Maryland Legislative Coalition – Climate Justice Wing

Friends of Quincy Run Watershed

Maryland Ornithological Society

Safe Skies Maryland

Vernal Pools

Surfrider Foundation

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Rock Creek Conservancy

Maryland League of Conservation Voters

National Aquarium