



Hearing before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland General Assembly
February 18, 2025

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on
SB 346, 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 and respect for all life. MCCH is a grassroots voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics. In the 2024 Legislative Session, 570 Maryland Catholics from 22 different Catholic parishes and religious communities across the State joined together through MCCH to support several key environmental bills under consideration by the General Assembly. MCCH is independent, though, and should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy positions of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

MCCH would like to express its strong support for the passage of Senate Bill 346, 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 microplastics 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)

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.

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, 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 346 is responsive to the Pope’s observations and recommendations. When enacted, it will respond to the current waste of resources resulting from the trashing of most of the 5.5 billion beverage containers annually sold in Maryland. The bill will also produce numerous benefits to our economy, environment, and health. Some of these benefits include:

- Capturing 3.6 billion additional beverage containers annually, including 2.3 billion plastic bottles, thereby increasing the rate of recycling in the state from 25 percent of containers to more than 90 percent.
- Increasing the availability of high-quality recycled feedstock, as the program under this bill is projected to generate annually an additional 13,328 tons of aluminum, 47,665 tons of PET plastic, 7,847 tons of HDPE plastic, and 159,397 tons of glass to be recycled into new containers.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions—231,707 metric tons of CO₂-equivalent air emissions would be eliminated each year, as a result of not having to produce new cans and bottles from virgin materials. This is comparable to removing the emissions of over 50,000 cars.
- Benefitting taxpayers and local governments, as they currently pay for disposal of beverage containers in our landfills and incinerators. These costs will be reduced because beverage containers will be diverted from landfills and incinerators. The program under this bill is self-financing. Fees from beverage producers, revenue from the sale of raw materials, unclaimed deposits, and penalties will finance the costs of collection and processing of beverage containers by a nonprofit Beverage Container Stewardship Organization, not by local governments.
- Creating jobs through investments in new refillable and reusable beverage container systems. The recycling generated by a deposit program creates five times as many jobs as landfilling or incineration.³
- Improving water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and other local waterways, where beverage containers account for a substantial proportion of the volume of trash polluting these waterways—trash that degrades both the God-given beauty and ecosystem health of our streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay.⁴

Senate Bill 346 builds on the proven success of similar programs in other states and can lead to a positive cultural change. Currently 10 states covering 90 million people have successful recycling programs.⁵ 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. As Pope Francis noted in the above quote from *Laudate Deum*, personal changes (such as recycling empty bottle containers) can lead to positive cultural changes and transformation.

At one time Maryland had a bottle refund program. Now is the time to bring back the bottle bill and begin to realize the environmental, health, economic, and cultural benefits it will bring.

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 346.

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.

³ Maryland Sierra Club, “Maryland Needs a Bottle Bill! HB 232/SB 346” [Fact Sheet], 2025.

⁴ According to the Anacostia Watershed Society, beverage containers are more than half of the trash by volume captured in the Anacostia watershed’s trash traps.

⁵ California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and Vermont. Redemption rates in 2021 ranged from 50 percent to 89 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.