



February 14, 2025

SB346 - Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program

Hearing Date: Tuesday, February 18, 2025

Position: FAVORABLE

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

Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the below signed organizations respectfully request a FAVORABLE report on SB346 which establishes a long-overdue beverage container recycling refund and litter reduction program in the state of Maryland.

Bottle trash, particularly plastic, is a pervasive blight in our waterways, posing a serious threat to the environment and aquatic life. As plastic breaks down into microplastics and nanoplastics, it further contaminates the environment, creating long-term ecological damage. This pollution doesn't just affect wildlife - it enters the human food chain through the consumption of contaminated seafood, and bioaccumulates in our brains at an alarming rate.¹ **Enacting a bottle deposit bill is crucial to reducing plastic waste and protecting both our environment and public health.**

The Anacostia River and Baltimore Harbor are two of the few waterways 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) or "pollution diet" for trash. **This means that trash is so prevalent in the watersheds that feed into the Anacostia River and Baltimore Harbor that the rivers aren't 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 Chesapeake Bay Watershed and beyond.

Even when beverage containers are properly discarded instead of being littered, their disposal can contribute to the compounding harms that disproportionately impact

¹ Bioaccumulation of microplastics in decedent human brains. Nature Medicine. Nihart et al. February 3, 2025. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-024-03453-1>

historically disenfranchised and overburdened communities. Maryland's CY2021 recycling rate was 42.46%, but that rate is highly variable by county and ranges from 62% in Prince George's County to 5% in Somerset County.² The remainder of the waste generated in Maryland is buried in landfills or burned in incinerators, which exacerbates the environmental injustices shouldered by lower-income residents across the state.

A beverage container deposit program is a common-sense and proven strategy to reduce litter, increase recycling rates, and incentivize environmental stewardship by turning trash into treasure with a fully-refundable deposit on plastic, glass, and metal bottles. Ten states in the US have already paved the way for this type of program in Maryland, and the results are clear; states with bottle deposit programs are achieving recycling rates of up to 65%, which is significantly higher than both Maryland's rate and the national average of 32%.³⁴

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, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay.
- Fewer plastic, glass, and metal bottles going to Maryland's incinerators, which means **cleaner air and less pollution** in our environment.
- **More space** in our landfills.
- **Reduced strain on public waste management** with a system that removes beverage containers from the municipal waste stream.

For all of the reasons outlined above, Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the below signed organizations urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB346

Sincerely,

Robin Broder, Acting Executive Director
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² County Recyclables by Commodity in Tons for CY21. Compiled by the Maryland Department of the Environment from Reports Submitted for CY21.
<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/RecyclingandOperationsprogram/Documents/County%20Commodity%20CY21.pdf>

³ The 50 States of Recycling. A State-by-State Assessment of US Packaging Recycling Rates, pp. 15-17. December 2023. Eunomia Research & Consulting Inc.

⁴ National Overview: Facts and Figures on Materials, Wastes and Recycling. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Last updated on November 8, 2024.
<https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/national-overview-facts-and-figures-materials>

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