



February 18, 2025

Chair Feldman
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller
Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 346 – Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 346. **Just Zero strongly supports this bill.**

Just Zero is a national environmental non-profit advocacy organization that works alongside communities, policy makers, scientists, educators, organizers, and others to implement just and equitable solutions to climate-damaging and toxic production, consumption, and waste disposal practices. We believe that all people deserve Zero Waste solutions with zero climate-damaging emissions and zero toxic exposures.

SB 346 would establish a beverage container recycling refund program – more commonly known as a “Bottle Bill” – in Maryland. Just Zero supports Bottle Bills because they reduce litter, increase recycling rates, create jobs, and develop both the consumer culture and infrastructure necessary for reusable beverage systems. If enacted this bill will significantly improve Maryland’s environment and economy.

We understand that Maryland is also considering adopting an Extended Producer Responsibility (“EPR”) for packaging program (SB 901). While we strongly support the development of an EPR for packaging program, it does not alleviate the need to enact a strong Bottle Bill.

Maryland should enact both programs because they are complementary. Passing both programs will enhance the benefits and goals of each, while choosing one program over the other will undermine Maryland’s efforts to effectively address the plastic pollution and waste crisis.

I. Bottle Bill Programs Are Incredibly Popular and Prevalent Across the World.

Bottle Bill programs have been implemented in dozens of jurisdictions around the world, with new programs developing each year. The first Bottle Bill was established in 1970, in British



Columbia, Canada.¹ Since then, over 50 jurisdictions have adopted programs, including ten U.S. states, almost all Canadian provinces, and a large portion of the European Union.² Right now, over 300 million people live in communities with a Bottle Bill.³ This number is expected to grow as more programs come online. Internationally, France, Poland, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay are all considering or actively developing Bottle Bill programs.⁴ This legislative session, Illinois, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington state, and Washington D.C. are all considering proposals to implement Bottle Bill programs. Massachusetts, New York, Michigan, and Vermont are considering proposals to expand and strengthen their existing Bottle Bill programs. These states understand Bottle Bills are necessary to meet waste reduction, recycling, and climate goals.

II. Bottle Bills Provide Significant Environmental and Economic Benefits

The reason Bottle Bill programs are so popular and prevalent throughout the world is because they're incredibly effective at reducing litter, increasing recycling, and creating jobs. Moreover, these programs create the consumer culture and infrastructure that is necessary to shift away from single-use disposal beverage containers to reusable and refillable beverage systems. Importantly, through producer responsibility requirements, Bottle Bill programs provide these benefits while saving consumers and governments money.

A. Litter Reduction

Placing a refundable deposit on every single-use beverage container sold in Maryland will incentivize consumers to recycle their empty containers. Essentially, the refundable deposit creates an understanding that while you are buying the beverage, you are renting the container. This incentive is extremely important because most single-use beverages are consumed on-the-go and outside of the home. This is why you see plastic soda bottles littering parks, streets, and streams, but not plastic peanut butter jars.

Bottle Bills can dramatically reduce the amount of litter that we see. After Hawaii enacted a Bottle Bill program in 2005, the number of beverage containers collected in Hawaii for Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup fell from 23,471 in 2004, to 8,200 in 2008 – a 65% drop in just four years.⁵ All ten states with Bottle Bills have experienced significant litter reduction. A 2020 study by Keep America Beautiful found that states without Bottle Bills have double the amount of beverage container litter than their Bottle Bill counterparts.⁶ The report

¹ Reloop, [Global Deposit Book 2024: An Overview of Deposit Return Systems for Single-Use Beverage Containers](#), 108 (Dec. 2024).

² *Id.* at 22, 72.

³ *Id.* at 13.

⁴ *Id.* at 189, 215-16.

⁵ Haw. Dep't of Health, [Report to the Twenty-Fifth Legislature 2010, Deposit Beverage Container Program](#), 6 (Dec. 2009).

⁶ Keep America Beautiful, [2020 National Litter Study](#), 3 (May 2021).



also found that states with Bottle Bills had less overall litter.⁷ Less litter doesn't just mean cleaner, more vibrant communities, it also means less spending on clean-up efforts. Estimates show that the United States spends more than \$11 billion on litter clean up every year.⁸

B. Increased Recycling of Beverage Containers

Though the ten current Bottle Bill states only represent 27% of the U.S. population, they account for over 50% of all beverage containers recycled annually.⁹ On average, states with Bottle Bills have double the recycling rates than those that rely solely on curbside recycling programs.¹⁰ For plastic and glass bottles, Bottle Bill programs achieve recycling rates that are three times higher than single-stream recycling systems.¹¹

While curbside recycling is convenient, it is operated as a single-stream, and this comes with a cost – contamination. Single-stream recycling depends first and foremost on educated consumers making the right choice about what can and cannot go into the blue bin. From there, the burden is on Material Recovery Facilities (“MRFs”) to remove any unrecyclable materials while also processing and sorting the commingled recyclables into distinct separate streams. These sorting processes are imperfect. According to the National Waste and Recycling Association, roughly 25% of what is placed into the single-stream recycling system is too contaminated to go anywhere other than a landfill.¹²

Bottle Bill programs, on the other hand, evade contamination more effectively and properly sort recyclable materials on the front end. This results in higher quality recycled material, significantly increasing its ability to be made into new products. Higher quality also is critical in avoiding downcycling. Downcycling results in recycled material being used for purposes that fail to capture the full environmental and economic benefits associated with recycling a product. In the case of beverage containers, the highest and best use is bottle-to-bottle recycling, where containers are recycled directly into new beverage containers. Common examples of downcycling with beverage containers include turning plastic beverage containers into carpet and textiles and using glass beverage containers for road improvement projects or landfill cover. While these uses are preferential to disposing of the material, it still means the materials can only be used once as opposed to being recycled repeatedly.

Creating a standalone program to collect and recycle beverage containers ensures that the materials are uncontaminated and able to be readily recycled. Moreover, Bottle Bill programs

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Andrew Lisa, [It Costs Over \\$11 Billion Per Year to Clean Up Litter – How the Pandemic’s Effect on Trash Output May Make It Worse](#), Yahoo (April 22, 2021).

⁹ Marissa Heffernan, [Report: Bottle bill states recycle more, provide models](#), Resource Recycling (Jan. 2, 2024).

¹⁰ Container Recycling Institute, [U.S. Nominal Recycling Rates by Deposit Status](#) (2019).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Maggie Koerth, [The Era of Easy Recycling May be Coming to an End](#), FiveThirtyEight (Jan. 10, 2019).



lead to higher overall recycling rates in those states since municipal and curbside recycling systems can then focus their efforts on capturing and recycling other common recyclables.¹³

C. Job Creation

Bottle Bills also create good, local jobs. Reports show that Bottle Bills can create between 11 and 38 times more jobs than curbside recycling.¹⁴ These jobs include technicians to service reverse vending machines, bag drop systems, as well as other forms of beverage container collection, storage systems, and sorting systems. Bottle Bills also create jobs associated with hauling beverage containers from redemption locations to centralized storage areas. There are also other indirect jobs created that are associated with increased recycling and manufacturing of products from recycled materials. A recent analysis of New York's Bottle Bill program found that it supports 5,700 jobs statewide.¹⁵

D. Creating a Pathway to Reusable and Refillable Beverage Systems

Additionally, Bottle Bill programs develop the infrastructure and consumer culture necessary to support reusable and refillable beverage systems. Historically, beverage companies relied on consumers to return bottles to be refilled. Because glass bottles were expensive to manufacture, refilling existing bottles saved costs. So, to encourage refilling, beverage companies utilized a deposit-return program to ensure glass containers were brought back and refilled. This harkens back to the days of the “milk man.”

Just Zero strongly supports the language in SB 346 that requires at least 10% of all beverage containers sold in Maryland be returned and refilled by December 31, 2034. This is a necessary and achievable program goal as demonstrated by other countries and states with high functioning Bottle Bill programs. For example, in Germany, 82% of all beer is sold in reusable bottles, 99% of beer bottles are returned for reuse, and 54% of beverages sold in Germany are in reusables.¹⁶ Moreover, refillables account for 24%, 27%, and 54% of the beverage market share in Brazil, Mexico, and Columbia respectively.¹⁷ 84% of beer sold in Ontario, Canada is in refillable bottles collected through the provinces Bottle Bill system.¹⁸

Finally, since launching a statewide refillable beer bottle system through its Bottle Bill program, Oregon reported a diversion of 407,840 bottles from recycling for reuse in 2019..¹⁹ Unfortunately Oregon's reuse program stalled because it was entirely voluntary. SB 346 shows that Maryland

¹³ Eunomia, [The 50 States of Recycling: a State-by-State Assessment of US Packaging Recycling Rates](#), 6 (Dec. 2023).

¹⁴ ReLoop, [Factsheet: Deposit Return Systems Create More Jobs](#), 2 (2022).

¹⁵ Sarah Edwards, Eunomia Research and Consulting, Inc., [Employment and Economic Impact of Container Deposits](#), table E1 (Jan. 2019).

¹⁶ Upstream, [Beverage Refill and the New Reuse Economy](#) (July 1, 2023).

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Container Recycling Institute, [Exploring refillables in the United States](#), 2 (April 7, 2021).



learned from Oregon's mistake by including a mandate for reusables which will ensure that the program consistently grows to foster reuse, not just recycling.

E. Bottles Bills Provide All These Benefits While Saving Residents and Communities Money.

Bottle Bill programs also provide these benefits at no cost to consumers or government, instead placing financial responsibility on producers who are creating and distributing single-use beverage containers. If a Bottle Bill program is developed in Maryland, cities, towns, and residents will no longer be stuck paying to collect, sort, and recycle all these containers. Instead, the large companies that manufacture them will.

The reduction in litter resulting from this program will also save the state and local governments money. In a span of five years, the Maryland Highway Administration spent \$39 million to clean up trash along state roads.²⁰ This is only a fraction of the cost of addressing litter as the figure does not include the costs of addressing beverage container litter along local roads, along beaches, and in rivers.

III. **Maryland Should Adopt a Bottle Bill *and* an EPR for Packaging Program.**

We understand that Maryland is considering adopting an EPR for packaging program.²¹ While we strongly support the legislative efforts to enact an EPR for packaging program, it must be in conjunction with a strong Bottle Bill. **Maryland should pass both programs because they will complement each other.**

Forgoing the development of a Bottle Bill program in favor of an EPR for packaging program – even if it includes beverage containers – because that will result in several negative consequences, such as:

- (1) **Elimination of litter reduction benefits associated with Bottle Bills:** When beverage containers are part of an EPR for Packaging Program, you do not get the refundable deposit on each container. As a result, consumers do not have an economic incentive to hold on to their containers for recycling. This means the containers are likely to continue to get littered and discarded, rather than recycled.
- (2) **Lowered quality of recycled material from beverage containers:** The containers that are currently captured through Maryland's recycling system are commingled with other recyclables. This commingling increases contamination, lowering the quality and value of the containers making it harder to recycle them. This is true even when the system is enhanced through an EPR for Packaging Program. A Bottle Bill will remove these containers by processing them through a separate recycling system which maximizes value and recyclability.

²⁰ Bryna Zumer, [Stop Littering! Trash on state roads cost MD Taxpayers \\$39M in 5 Years](#), Fox News (Dec. 3, 2021).

²¹ [SB 901](#), 2025 Leg., 447th Sess. (Md. 2025).



- (3) **Lowered recycling rates for all packaging materials:** One of the key goals of an EPR for packaging program is to develop new ways to collect and manage hard to recycle materials. If a state does not have a Bottle Bill, EPR programs must divert precious resources to manage beverage containers rather than focusing on addressing other, more problematic packaging. There is already evidence of the higher recycling rates for packaging achieved through enacting a Bottle Bill.²² States with Bottle Bill recycle 34% of packaging, compared to 7% in non-Bottle Bill states.²³

IV. Conclusion

The time to act is now. This bill will improve recycling, create green jobs, and reduce litter which will protect Maryland's land, rivers, lakes, and oceans. With SB 346, Maryland can create a robust and effective Bottle Bill program that will protect the environment and strengthen the economy. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

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Just Zero

²² Eunomia, The 50 States of Recycling: a State-by-State Assessment of US Packaging Recycling Rates, 6. (Dec. 2023).

²³ *Id.*