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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 99 - "Beverage Container Deposit Program – Establishment and Advisory Commission"

Position: Support with Amendments

Hearing Date: February 9, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB99, with some clarifying amendments. This bill would create an Advisory Commission of stakeholders charged with developing a framework for a beverage container deposit law in Maryland with a 10-cent refundable deposit that achieves a statewide redemption target of 90%. The Advisory Commission must make recommendations on implementing the program by December 1, 2021, and the Maryland Department of the Environment must establish the program by September 1, 2022.

Beverage container deposit programs are a proven, highly effective policy for recovering used beverage containers and reducing litter. These programs add a small 5-cent or 10-cent deposit to the purchase of beverage containers that can be redeemed by customers when the containers are returned for recycling. Ten states in the U.S., covering about 90 million people, have longstanding, successful, and cost-effective beverage container deposit programs. Redemption rates in 2019 averaged 75%, ranging from 59% to 91% (Exhibit 1).¹ The programs generally are financed through unredeemed deposits.

Beverage container deposit programs have many economic and environmental benefits:²

- More opportunities to recycle, especially for people away from home or who live in areas where curbside recycling is not available;
- Financial incentives for recycling and collection of source-separated, high-quality recyclable materials, with minimum contamination;³
- Greenhouse gas reduction with expanded use of recycled scrap materials from recycling;⁴
- Prevention of litter,⁵ reduction of waste, and reduced environmental impact of beverage containers on land and in our waterways, the Chesapeake Bay, and the ocean;
- Job creation; and
- Substantial cost savings for counties and municipalities by diverting container waste from landfills and incinerators and reducing the number of beverage containers placed in curbside collection.⁶

¹ California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Vermont. As of early 2020, there were 58 container deposit programs worldwide, with a big increase in interest in the past decade as public concern about plastic pollution has increased. Collins, Susan. 2020. "International Embrace," *Plastics Recycling Update*, Winter. Pp. 38-43.

² <http://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/about-bottle-bills/benefits-of-bottle-bills>

³ In mixed materials recycling, glass is a major contaminant and often has a negative value. Removing glass contamination raises the value of other recycled materials. Glass in deposit programs is cleaner, sorted by color, with a higher value, and recycled.

⁴ University of Maryland, Environmental Finance Center (EFC). 2011. "2011 Impact Analysis of a Beverage Container Deposit Program in Maryland." December 15, p. 6.

⁵ "In fact, there is little evidence that any other program, in and of itself, is nearly as effective as deposit programs at reducing litter rates." *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶ In states with beverage container deposit programs, curbside and deposit coexist to maximize recycling.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.

The proposed program would increase Maryland’s beverage container recycling rate four-fold, removing more than three billion containers annually from landfills, incinerators, and litter.

According to estimates by the Container Recycling Institute (CRI), 5.2 billion beverage containers were sold in Maryland in 2018.⁷ However, only about a fifth (22%) of them were recycled. The balance of more than four billion containers are left in the environment— in landfills, on roadsides, in waterways – or incinerated. Beverage containers comprise 6% of landfilled municipal solid waste in Prince George’s County⁸ and 8% or more in Wicomico County,⁹ by weight. Experience from beverage deposit programs in Michigan and Oregon shows that a 90% redemption rate in Maryland is feasible with a 10-cent deposit (Exhibit 1), increasing the beverage container recycling rate more than fourfold.

The program will reduce Maryland’s beverage container litter and marine pollution. Plastic beverage bottles are the third most frequently littered plastic in beach cleanups.¹⁰ A study of coastal litter in debris surveys in Australian and U.S. states with and without container deposit legislation found that the share of containers in states with container deposit legislation was 40% lower than in states without the laws.¹¹ In Maryland, beverage containers represent half of the trash by volume collected in trash traps in the Anacostia River watershed (Exhibit 2).

To strengthen the impact of the program, we recommend:

- (a) Expanding the list of covered beverages to include carbonated and non-carbonated non-alcoholic drinks, such as: bottled iced tea and coffee; sports and energy drinks; fruit juice and vegetable drinks; and flavored water.¹²
- (b) Including public oversight, monitoring, enforcement authority, and meaningful penalties as a feature of the program framework developed by the Advisory Commission.

The first proposals for a Maryland beverage container deposit program were launched many years ago. Every year they have been improved to address issues raised by opponents. *But every year we have waited, another 4 billion containers have been left in the environment.* After establishing the program provided for in this bill, there will be adjustments made over time, as in other programs. What we need to do now is to take the first big step. We respectfully request a favorable report on HB99.

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⁷ Includes only cans and bottles. An additional 425 million paper cartons, and foil pouch beverage containers were sold in 2018, but are not included in U.S. beverage container deposit programs.

⁸ SCS Engineers. Waste Characterization Study, 2014/2015. Waste Management Division, Prince George’s County, Maryland.

⁹ EA Engineering, Science, and Technology, Inc. 2014. “Waste Composition Study: Newland Park Landfill, Wicomico County, Maryland.” July, Table 3.

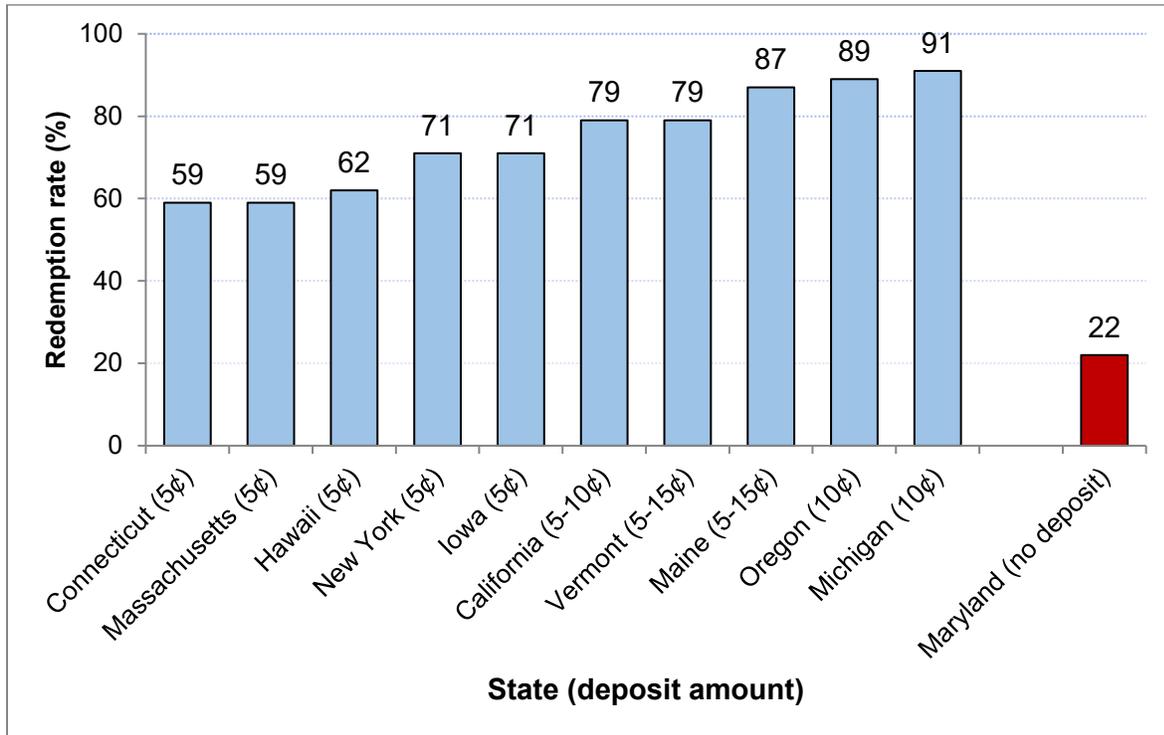
¹⁰ 5 Gyres Institute. 2017. “Better Alternatives Now, B.A.N. List 2.0.”

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5522e85be4b0b65a7c78ac96/t/5acbd346562fa79982b268fc/1523307375028/5Gyres_BANlist2.pdf

¹¹ Schuyler, Qamar, *et al.* 2018. “Economic incentives reduce plastic inputs to the ocean,” *Marine Policy* 96: 250-255. October.

¹² The current draft covers only containers for water, soft drinks, beer, and other alcoholic beverages (p. 3, lines 14-15).

Exhibit 1. Redemption rates for beverage containers in bottle bill states in 2019, compared with Maryland’s estimated 2018 beverage container recycling rate



Note: Statistic for Maryland is the estimated recycling rate for all beverage cans and bottles sold in the state in 2018.
Source: Container Recycling Institute (2020). “2018 Beverage Market Data Analysis.”

Exhibit 2. Beverage containers are half of litter by volume collected in the Nash Run trash trap, Anacostia Watershed



Source: Anacostia Watershed Society

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