



HB 735 - Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Hearing Date: February 28, 2024

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee:

Waterkeepers Chesapeake supports HB735 and urges a FAVORABLE report. HB 735 - Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction would set up a recycling refund program for beverage containers. The most effective recycling programs in the United States are in the 10 states where consumers can get a refund in exchange for returning their beverage container for recycling. HB735 will bring this program to Maryland.

The ten states with recycling refund programs supply 50% of our nation's recyclable glass supply.¹ In states with recycling refunds, the recycling rate for plastic bottles is 67%. States without a recycling refund program recycle 17% of their plastic bottles on average.² States with recycling refund programs have 50% less litter than other states.³

The beverage container deposit program would be a 10- or 15-cent refundable deposit on metal, glass, and plastic beverage containers, depending on container size. The deposit is refunded to the customer when the beverage container is returned for recycling. The program would be self-financing from fees paid by producers, revenue from the sale of raw materials, unclaimed deposits, and penalties. Ten percent of unclaimed deposits would fund a Grant Program to increase the reuse and recycling of beverage containers.

This is a tried and true, effective policy that will significantly reduce trash and litter in our streets, neighborhoods and waterways.

By contrast, Maryland taxpayers are funding significant costs associated with litter. 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. Organizations across Maryland conduct hundreds of cleanups with thousands of volunteers annually. Perhaps the

¹ Glass Packaging Institute, 2023.

² The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of Containers and Packaging Recycling Rates 2021

³ Keep America Beautiful 2020 National Litter Study <https://kab.org/litter-study>

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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. In addition, microplastics pose an urgent public health threat.

About 2.6 billion plastic beverage containers are not recycled in Maryland and are left in the environment⁴ --- in landfills, on roadsides, in waterways – or incinerated. Plastic beverage containers pollute our waterways and pose a threat to wildlife and human health. Plastic bottles break down from friction or sunlight/UV exposure creating microplastics -- pieces of plastic less than 5 millimeters in size. As microplastics travel around the environment by wind, rain runoff, or surface currents, they have plenty of opportunities to interact with plants, animals and humans through ingestion or inhalation. Unfortunately, exposure to microplastics can lead to a host of human health issues⁵ including reproductive deficiency, weight gain and endocrine disruption, and cancer. These health issues are due to chemical makeup of all sorts of plastics, including the chemical additives that give plastics their properties such as coloring agents, plasticizers, or forever chemicals known as PFAS.

Recycling refund programs for beverage containers go hand in hand with legislation passed last year initiating the process to adopt producer responsibility for packaging. It is estimated that 40 to 60 percent of packaging is beverage containers.⁶ Producer responsibility programs help us *reduce* our volume of waste. Recycling refund programs help us *reuse* and *recycle* a major portion of the packaging waste stream.

Recycling refund programs are a proven winner. We respectfully urge this committee to give HB753 a favorable report.

Contact:

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⁴ Container Recycling Institute, Beverage Data Analysis, based on 2019 data.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme, <https://www.undp.org/kosovo/blog/microplastics-human-health-how-much-do-they-harm-us>, June 2023

⁶ National Stewardship Action Council