



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on: SB 342 – “Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 10, 2026

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports SB 342, which aims to reduce beverage container litter and plastic pollution in Maryland. It would create a beverage container deposit program with a 10- or 15-cent refundable deposit on metal, glass, and plastic beverage containers. The deposit would be refunded to the customer when the beverage container is returned for recycling. By attaching value to empty beverage containers, fewer are littered and those that are littered do not remain in the environment. These programs have been highly effective in the U.S. and around the world for reducing beverage container litter and diverting containers from disposal. They also produce a number of other important benefits, highlighted below.

The problem

Beverage container litter in Maryland is pervasive, growing, and is a major source of plastic pollution, posing threats to the environment and human health. About 5.5 billion beverage containers are sold in Maryland every year, but only about a quarter are recycled.¹ Four billion containers annually are wasted – left in landfills, on roadsides, in waterways, or incinerated. More than half of these wasted containers are plastic. Beverage containers, most of them plastic, account most of the trash in trash traps on the Anacostia River watershed (Exhibit 1).²

Maryland’s beverage container litter problem is so severe that the Environmental Protection Agency declared the Anacostia watershed to be impaired with trash in 2010, and made the same determination in 2014 for the watershed surrounding Baltimore Harbor. Our state, home to the largest estuary in the country – the Chesapeake Bay – also has the dubious distinction of having two of the three water bodies in the country that are impaired for trash and regulated by the EPA under the Clean Water Act. The Maryland State Highway Administration collected 3.3 million pounds of roadside litter on State roads, at a cost of \$17.6 million of taxpayer money, up from \$8.9 million in 2020. This is in addition to roadside litter cleanup financed by local governments. A large share of roadside litter is beverage containers.³

Plastic pollution from beverage containers poses a threat to wildlife and human health. The containers break into ever smaller pieces and are ingested by marine life, injuring and killing fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. Plastic particles have been found in the food we eat, the air we breathe, and in most human organs, including the human brain. Scientists estimate that we are ingesting up to a credit card’s worth of plastic weekly.⁴ The impact of plastic ingestion on human health, in terms of inflammation and the leaching of chemicals from the plastic, is of great concern.

The solution

Beverage container deposit programs are a proven, highly effective policy for recovering used beverage containers and reducing litter.⁵ Ten states in the U.S., covering about 90 million people, have longstanding, successful beverage container deposit programs.⁶ Beverage container litter in those states was reduced by 70-84%.⁷ The 2020

¹ Container Recycling Institute (CRI). “2024 Beverage Market Data Analysis (BMDA)” for Maryland, based on 2021 data.

² Anacostia Watershed Society, Anacostia Riverkeeper.

³ State Highway Administration website, “Litter Removal” (<https://roads.maryland.gov/mdotsha/pages/index.aspx?PageId=358>) See also the MDOT/SHA Litter Fact Sheet (https://roads.maryland.gov/OC/Litter_Fact_Sheet_2025.pdf)

⁴ Dahlberg and University of Newcastle, Australia. 2019. *No Plastic in Nature: Assessing Plastic Ingestion from Nature to People*. Commissioned by the World Wildlife Fund.

⁵ Millette, Samantha, and Clarissa Morawski. 2025. *Littered With Evidence: Proof that Deposit Systems Work*. Reloop, June.

⁶ California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Vermont.

National Litter Survey sponsored by Keep America Beautiful, found half as much deposit-material litter per capita in bottle bill states as in non-bottle bill states.⁸ 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.⁹

Refundable deposits both reduce litter and greatly increase recycling rates for beverage containers covered by these programs. Recycling rates for beverage containers in the ten deposit states in 2019 averaged 75%, ranging from 59% to 91%, compared with an estimated 23% in Maryland, with no deposit (Exhibit 2). Two states – Michigan and Oregon – have achieved recycling rates of 90% with a 10-cent deposit. Deposit beverage containers are 2-3 times more likely to be recycled than are containers not subject to a deposit (Exhibit 3). The ten deposit states represent 27% of the U.S. population but contribute 48% of U.S. beverage container recycling.¹⁰ In states with beverage container deposit programs, deposits coexist with curbside collection to maximize recycling by capturing containers for beverages consumed at and away from home.

The **Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program** (SB 342, a.k.a, the “Maryland Bottle Bill”) would initiate a deposit as of January 1, 2029 and has benefitted from lessons learned over the past 50 years for successful beverage container deposit programs.

- It would maximize the reduction of beverage container litter and waste by including all beverages in metal, plastic, and glass beverage containers¹¹ and setting a deposit level that will motivate the public to change behavior: 10¢ for containers holding up to 24 fluid ounces and 15¢ for larger containers, up to 3 liters.
- It would require beverage producers to take responsibility for financing and implementing the program, with significant oversight from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). The program would be implemented by a non-profit Beverage Container Stewardship Organization of all beverage producers selling or distributing redeemable beverage containers in the State. MDE’s responsibilities would include: appointing the Stewardship Organization; approving a Stewardship Plan and annual reports; and setting convenience standards and handling fees, among others. An Advisory Council of stakeholders would advise MDE on approval of the Stewardship Organization, its stewardship plan, annual reports, and program implementation and performance.
- It would create the conditions for future development and adoption of reusable/refillable beverage container systems. Ten percent of unclaimed deposits would fund a Recycling Refund Grant program, managed by the Chesapeake Bay Trust, to increase the reuse and recycling of beverage containers.
- The program would pay for itself, including MDE oversight. It would be funded from registration and Stewardship Organization fees paid by beverage producers, the revenue from sale of raw materials, unclaimed deposits, and penalties paid by producers. Registration fees calculated to completely cover the costs of MDE oversight in the next year would be kept in a special account in the State Recycling Trust Fund that can only be used for specific program purposes. MDE’s start-up costs will be reimbursed by producers to the General Fund at the start of the first year of operation.

Several features of the bill have been updated in response to feedback from stakeholders since it was first introduced in the 2023 General Assembly, including:

- Implementation by a single stewardship organization to facilitate MDE oversight.
- Extension of the preparation time for program launch by one year (from 18 to 30 months)
- Ensuring that MDE’s start-up expenditures are fully covered, via reimbursements to the General Fund. The program is completely self-financing.

⁷ Reloop and CRI. 2021. *Fact Sheet: Deposit Return Systems Reduce Litter*. <https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/DRS-Litter-Fact-Sheet-Summary-14June2021.pdf>

⁸ Keep America Beautiful. 2021. “2020 National Litter Survey”, Summary Report. May.

⁹ Schuyler, Qamar, *et al.* 2018. “Economic incentives reduce plastic inputs to the ocean,” *Marine Policy* 96: 250-255. October.

¹⁰ CRI. “2024 Beverage Market Data Analysis (BMDA)” for Maryland, based on 2021 data. *Op.Cit.*

¹¹ Medical beverages and infant formula are the only excluded beverages.

- Clarifying the expectations for retailers and hospitality establishments (sellers of beverages consumed on premises, such as restaurants, hotels, bars, sports venues)
- Exempting small retailers with less than 3,000 square feet of sales area or 150 square feet or less of shelf space displaying redeemable containers from having to accept most containers for redemption and refund.
- Adding a per container materials handling fee for hospitality establishments for collecting and pre-sorting empty redeemed containers to be picked up by the program for recycling.
- Adding provisions for MDE to add more container types in the future.
- Designating the Chesapeake Bay Trust to manage the Grant Program, instead of MDE, and authorizing the Grant Program to finance an evaluation of the investments and policies required to increase the share of reusable containers sold in the state to 10% by 2038.
- Clarifying that local governments are not responsible for financing, operating, or enforcing redemption centers.
- Requiring the Stewardship Organization to reimburse public and private materials recovery facilities for the costs of collecting, transporting, sorting, and processing all unredeemed redeemable containers they collect.

The program's benefits

Reduction in beverage container litter and plastic pollution: The program would capture 3.6 billion additional beverage containers annually for recycling, including 2.3 billion plastic bottles, diverting at least 236,000 tons of plastic, aluminum, and glass containers from litter, landfills, and incinerators.

Quadrupling of Maryland's beverage container recycling rate: With a 10-cent deposit, the recycling rate for beverage containers, currently estimated at only about 25% of containers sold in the state, would more than triple, to 90% or more, within the first five years of operation.

Increase in high quality, food-grade recycled content for new food and beverage containers: When the targets are achieved, the program would generate 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 annually. The program would contribute to creating a circular, bottle-to-bottle economy that maximizes the reduction in waste.

Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions: By reducing the production of new cans and bottles from virgin materials, the additional recycling from the bill would eliminate 231,707 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent, annually, the equivalent of removing the emissions of 50,000 cars from the road.

The program is affordable and reduces costs for taxpayers and local governments: The deposit is fully refundable, offers money to people who recycle. Beverage producers would finance the costs of collecting and processing the three-quarters of beverage containers currently being disposed or littered, as well as MDE's startup costs and oversight. The program will divert materials from costly landfills and incinerators. These disposal costs are currently borne by taxpayers and local governments.¹² Refundable deposits do not raise the price of beverage containers or affect beverage sales.¹³

Investments in refillable and reusable beverage container systems: Deposits are critical for development of refillable and reusable containers. The program will launch that transition, with a target of 10% of beverage containers sold in Maryland to be reusable and refillable by 2038.

Job creation: Increased recycling generated by a deposit program would create five times as many jobs in collection, sorting, and transporting as created by garbage collection, hauling, landfilling, or incineration.¹⁴ The maintenance of reverse vending machines and investments in the reuse/refill systems will create new opportunities.

¹² A review of more than 48 studies of the impact of beverage container deposit programs on costs to local governments worldwide found that in the context of the overall waste management system, local governments saved costs by adopting the deposit program. Reloop. 20251. *Fact Sheet: Economic benefits of deposit return systems for municipalities*. November. <https://www.reloopplatform.org/resources/economic-benefits-of-deposit-return-systems-for-municipalities/>

¹³ Reloop and Container Recycling Institute. 2023. *The impact of deposit return systems on beverage sales*. <https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Reloop-Impact-of-DRS-Report.pdf>

¹⁴ Reloop. 2021. *Fact Sheet: Deposit Return Systems Create More Jobs*. <https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/DRS-Factsheet-Jobs-5FEB2021.pdf> .

Overwhelming public support for the Maryland Bottle Bill

According to a January 2025 statewide public opinion poll of registered voters conducted by Gonzales Research, 95% of respondents are concerned about the environmental and health impact of plastic beverage containers and pollution (Exhibit 4). More than 90% of respondents supported a beverage container redemption program in Maryland with a 10-cent refundable deposit that could be refunded at a convenient retailer or redemption site, financed and implemented by beverage companies, not taxpayers. The level of support was at least 80% among all demographic groups, party affiliations, and geographic regions of the state (Baltimore City, Baltimore suburbs, Washington suburbs, and rural areas).¹⁵

Deposit programs complement extended producer responsibility for packaging laws

In 2025, Maryland became one of six states that have passed an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program for packaging (SB 901). That program will, among other things, increase access to curbside recycling and require producers to reimburse service providers for the collection, transport, and processing of packaging made from covered materials. However, without a refundable deposit, it will have a negligible impact on reducing beverage container litter or wastage. Many beverages are consumed away from home, so don't enter a curbside bin. Deposit return programs are a type of producer responsibility program that is uniquely effective in reducing beverage container litter because, when empty containers have a refund attached to them, they are more likely to be returned for recycling. The two programs – EPR for packaging and bottle bills -- complement each other and together maximize the benefits to the state. Maryland needs both of them. SB 901 acknowledged this synergy in stating that the passage of packaging EPR legislation “may not be construed to...preclude the separate adoption of a beverage container deposit return program in the State to reduce beverage container pollution and plastic waste.” (§9-2504) The Maryland Bottle Bill offers a proven approach to keeping beverage containers, which consistently rank among the most littered items in our communities, out of our streets and waterways and reducing plastic pollution. In fact, countries across the globe are adding deposit return systems to their existing EPR for packaging programs to increase the capture rate for beverage containers and reduce plastic pollution.¹⁶

Conclusion

Maryland is facing a plastic pollution crisis that is impacting our health and the environment. Beverage container deposit programs are highly effective in reducing beverage container litter, and most are plastic. Bottle bills are spreading worldwide, fueled by public concern about plastic pollution. The proposed program makes beverage producers responsible for fixing the problem and paying for it. And there is overwhelming public support for the program. **We can't afford to wait any longer to act. It's time to pass the Maryland Bottle Bill now.** Every year we wait, another 4 billion containers are left in the environment.

The Sierra Club respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 342.

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Attachments:

Exhibit 1 - Beverage containers account for more than 70% of trash in Anacostia River trash traps.

Exhibit 2 - Recycling rates for covered beverage containers in deposit states vs. Maryland, 2019

Exhibit 3 - Recycling rates by material type in deposit and non-deposit states, 2019

Exhibit 4 - Public support for the Maryland Bottle Bill

¹⁵Gonzales Polls, Inc. *Maryland Statewide Survey January 2025, Beverage Container Results*, conducted 12/27/2024 – 1/4/2025, with a sample of 811 registered voters. The margin of error is +/- 3.5%..

<https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/gonzales-report-sierra-club-beverage-container-redemption-program-january-2025.pdf>.

¹⁶ https://www.container-recycling.org/images/2026/CRI_EPR-DRS-Factsheet-Oct-1-2025.pdf

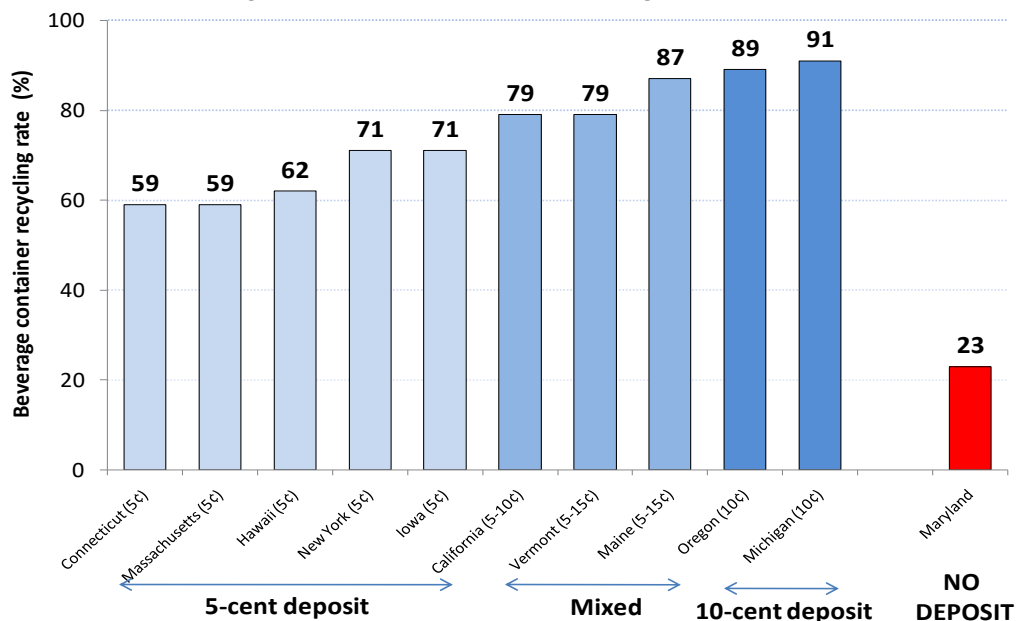
Exhibit 1: Beverage containers account for more than 70% of trash in Anacostia River trash traps, by volume



Source: Trash sort from the River Terrace Trash Trap, Anacostia River, September 28, 2024

Exhibit 2:

Recycling rates (%) for covered beverage containers in deposit states vs. Maryland, 2019



Source: Container Recycling Institute, 2022 Beverage Market Data Analysis

Exhibit 3:

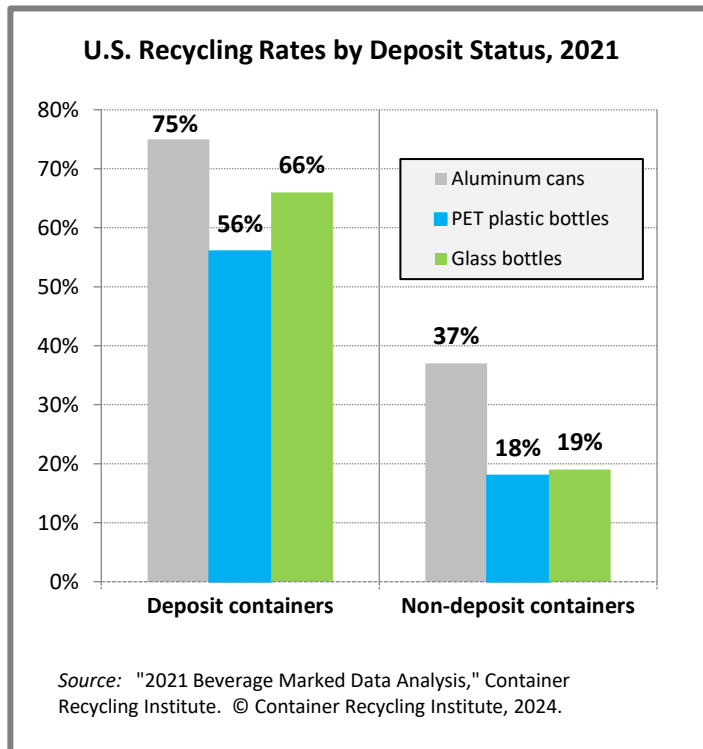
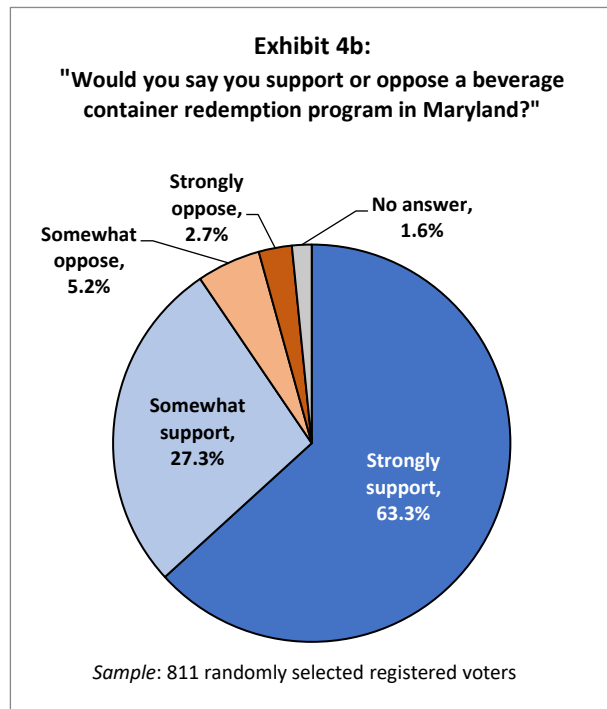
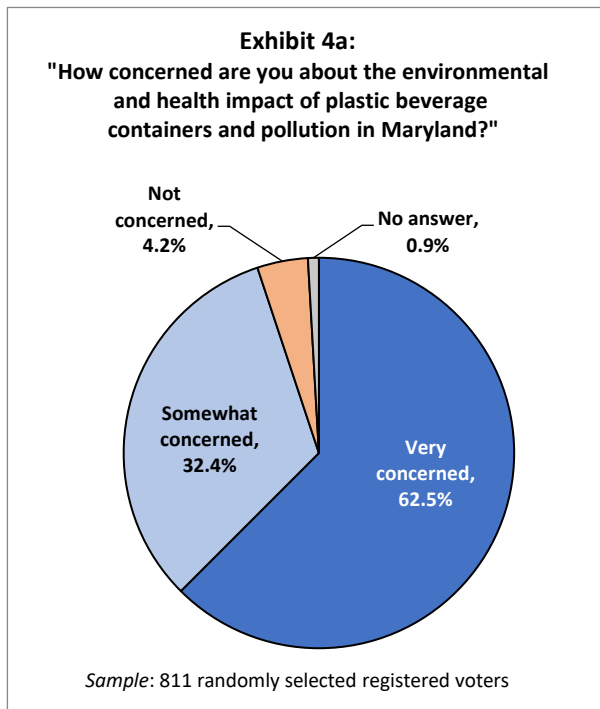


Exhibit 4: Public support for a Maryland Bottle Bill



Source: Gonzales Polls, Inc. *Maryland Statewide Survey January 2025, Beverage Container Results*
<https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/gonzales-report-sierra-club-beverage-container-redemption-program-january-2025.pdf>