



February 6, 2026

SB342 - Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program

Hearing Date: Tuesday, February 10, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

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

Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the below signed organizations respectfully request a FAVORABLE report on SB342 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 have 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.

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>

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

We support SB342 for the following reasons:

- Litter reduction is a primary and unique benefit of beverage container deposit-return programs compared to curbside recycling programs alone. A 2020 national litter study found states with beverage container recycling refunds have 50% less litter than other states.⁵
- Local governments across the state spend millions more on litter abatement and cleanup programs in our neighborhoods, urban districts, and waterways. Maryland's State Highway Administration spends more than \$17 Million annually to remove roadside litter on state roads. Reducing litter at the source will save our state money.
- SB342 will shift responsibility for beverage container waste from local governments and taxpayers to the producers of the containers.
- In states with recycling refunds, the recycling rate for plastic bottles is 63%. States

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>

⁵ Keep America Beautiful 2020 National Litter Study <https://kab.org/litter-study>

- without a recycling refund program recycle only 17% of their plastic bottles on average.⁶
- Bottle bill states, with just 28% of the population, capture more materials for recycling and are responsible for 47% of glass bottles and jars recycled, 51% of aluminum cans recycled, and 62% of all PET bottles recycled nationally.⁷
 - The ten US states with recycling refund programs produce cleaner material streams and supply more than 50% of glass cullet the glass container industry can use.⁸
 - Curbside recycling programs and recycling refunds co-exist in all ten U.S. states with bottle bills. In fact, environmental benefits are maximized when well-designed beverage container recycling refunds are paired with extended producer responsibility for other packaging materials.⁹

Beverage container recycling refunds are effective. This is a tried and true policy that will significantly reduce the estimated 40-60% litter made of beverage containers trashing our streets, neighborhoods, and waterways, and the fully implemented program will be funded by producers rather than taxpayers.

By contrast, today Maryland taxpayers bear significant costs for litter removal. Here are just a few examples. The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) alone spends over \$17M annually to remove approximately nearly 3.3 million pounds of litter. SHA litter removal costs have nearly doubled since 2020, from \$8.9M to \$17.6M per year. According to the agency “that’s more than \$68 million” spent on litter in 5 years.¹⁰ Despite having well-developed residential recycling programs, Maryland local governments still must fund their own street cleaning, urban district, and park and stream litter cleanup programs. Trash Free Maryland also knows of hundreds of cleanups across Maryland conducted by thousands of volunteers annually. There are thousands more conducted by residents in their own communities. Other societal costs of litter are unquantified. Health professionals tell us children who grow up in communities with litter are less likely to have successful outcomes. Littered plastic containers break down in the environment into smaller pieces and microplastics, potentially irreversibly harming human health and Maryland’s unique aquatic resources. Litter affects us all.

Fortunately there is a policy solution and we can benefit from lessons learned through decades of implementation elsewhere to craft a bill uniquely beneficial to Maryland.

Recycling refund programs for beverage containers go hand-in-hand with extended producer responsibility for other types of packaging. Several states – California, Maine, and Oregon – will implement packaging producer responsibility alongside existing beverage container deposit return systems. Around the world, fourteen governments with fully implemented extended producer responsibility for packaging and paper products recognize the unique benefits of

⁶ National Stewardship Action Foundation and Eunomia State of the States Report 2021

⁷ The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of Containers and Packaging Recycling Rates 2021

⁸ Glass Packaging Institute 2024

⁹ Eunomia: The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of US Packaging Recycling Rates 2023/2024
<https://www.ball.com/sustainability/real-circularity/50-states-of-recycling>

¹⁰ Maryland State Highway Administration, Litter Removal, Cost of Litter,
<https://roads.maryland.gov/mdotsha/pages/index.aspx?PageId=358> (accessed February 2026)

beverage container recycling refunds and are now implementing complementary deposit return systems alongside their packaging programs.¹¹ Deposit return systems help capture more materials and cleaner commodity streams, especially for containers consumed away from home and curbside recycling programs. Recycling refund programs help capture highly recyclable beverage containers that might otherwise be wasted or littered to feed demand for high quality recycled materials.

Marylanders take great pride in our natural environment and are fed up with litter. Marylanders are concerned about litter's health impacts and contribution to microplastic loading in the environment. SB342 is a modern recycling refund program based on proven policies that are effective, equitable, and supported by the public. We look forward to working with you on this exciting and highly impactful policy.

For all of the reasons outlined above, Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the below signed organizations urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB342.

Sincerely,

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¹¹ The Status of EPR-PPP and DRS Around the World, Container Recycling Institute, https://www.container-recycling.org/images/2025/CRI_EPR-DRS_Factsheet_May_21_2025.pdf

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