

SB 342 - SUPPORT

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Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

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Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 342, the Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program.

I am a retired private citizen in Bethesda, a member of Third Act Maryland, and a member of the Creation Care Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington which includes 32 parishes in the District and 50 more in Maryland. **Third Act Maryland** is a volunteer organization that brings together over-60 adults who want to build a better future for our children and grandchildren – in this case, by reducing our human impact on the natural environment.

At St. Columba's Episcopal Church we have partnered on several occasions with the Ward 8 Woods Conservancy, an inspiring grassroots group that works to increase the health, beauty, and public enjoyment of urban forests east of the Anacostia River, on their monthly cleanup activities in the District and neighboring Prince George's County. It is shocking and dispiriting to see the bottle and can pollution in these areas, and while it is rewarding to see the results of a good clean-up, the size of the problem remains daunting. Speaking for myself, I see this work as a small personal form of reparations: We collectively created this problem, and we should work together to clean it up.

Why should we care? We are called by our faith to love God and love our neighbor. Loving God implies loving His creation and treating nature with love and respect. Loving our neighbor implies acting as a community to take care of our neighborhood environments as we would our own homes.

Street trash is a visual symbol of indifference to our surroundings and well-being. Additionally, bottles and cans are breeding grounds for disease-carrying mosquitoes and sources of microplastic contamination that harms birds and animals as well as ourselves. If SB 342 is enacted, it is expected that Maryland can recover more than 90% of now-discarded beverage containers, amounting to 3.5 billion fewer wasted containers a year.

In the District of Columbia, a hearing on the proposed Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025 was held before the Council's Committee on Business and Economic Development on Oct. 1. No action was taken, but the bill was automatically re-referred to the Committee on Transportation and the Environment, from which it is expected to emerge this spring. It has 11 of the 13 Council members as cosponsors. Parallel action in the Maryland General Assembly would alleviate some cross-border concerns. Ten U.S. states already have a successful bottle bill: CA, CT, HI, IA, ME, MA, MI, NY, OR, and VT.

The proposed legislation you are considering today would help us to open our children's eyes to parks and woods as places to connect with the wonders of nature and not as trash dumps; and to our rivers as places of beauty and wildlife, not as toxic sewers to avoid.

The Episcopal Church is part of an international effort for prayer and action for climate justice and an end to environmental racism and ecological destruction. We cannot today resolve all the manmade threats to the natural world, but we can take this small step toward a more beautiful, healthful, and natural world.

I urge a favorable report on SB 342.