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Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee
Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal
Service Program Workgroup



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 342
Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and
Litter Reduction Program/ “The Maryland Bottle Bill”

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 10, 2026

Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on SB 342, Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program, also known as the Maryland Bottle Bill. The purpose of this bill is to reduce beverage container litter and plastic pollution, while also improving environmental quality and reducing costs borne by taxpayers and local governments.

Of the 5.5 billion beverage containers sold in Maryland each year, only about a quarter are recycled. The other four billion containers are discarded as waste in landfills, along roadsides, in waterways or through incineration. Beverage container litter is pervasive. More than half the trash captured in traps on the Anacostia River is beverage containers. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has declared the Anacostia watershed and Baltimore Harbor to be impaired by trash and regulated by the EPA under the Clean Water Act. Our state, which is home to the largest estuary in the country — the Chesapeake Bay — thus has two of the nation’s three bodies of water that are impaired by trash.

Plastic litter floating down our waterways is contributing to a plastic pollution and microplastic crisis. This debris degrades into smaller pieces that threaten both wildlife and human health. Scientists have found microplastics and smaller nanoplastics in virtually every organ in the human body, including the brain. The plastic particles in our bodies are a source of inflammation and leach toxins embedded in the plastic into our bodies. In 2024 alone, the State Highway Administration captured about 3.3 million pounds of roadside litter at a cost of \$17.6 million, up from \$8.9 million in 2020.

To reduce litter, trashed containers, and recover more containers for recycling, ten other states and about sixty territories or countries worldwide have implemented successful beverage

container deposit programs. These programs aim to change consumer behavior by adding a small refundable deposit to the purchase of beverage containers. The deposit is fully refunded when the containers are returned for recycling. Two states — Michigan and Oregon — have even achieved recycling rates of 90% with a 10-cent deposit.

How the Program Would Work

SB 342 would add a 10-15 cent deposit on the price of beverages in glass, plastic, and metal beverage containers, depending on the size of the container. The deposits would be fully refunded when the empty containers are returned for recycling. The program would maximize the convenience of returning empty containers and collecting refunds for consumers and businesses.

Customers would return bottles and cans at dedicated redemption facilities or a convenient retailer's place of business using reverse vending machines, a bag drop, or other redemption method.

- Reverse vending machines accept individual containers, one at a time, counting and verifying that the containers were subject to a deposit, crushing them in the back of the machine, and issuing a scrip to the customer for the amount of the refund owed, which can be cashed in at the retailer's checkout.
- Bag drops accept the redemptions outside of retail establishments. These standalone facilities are often shared by more than one retailer, and are located in commercial zones, parking areas, or municipal sites. Customers create an account and may leave unsorted containers of different types in a drop-off bag with their personal barcode affixed. The bags are collected by the system operator, counted and sorted off-site, and the customer receives the refunded deposits in their account. They can access the funds in the account at a small kiosk in the store, which issues a scrip that can be cashed in at the retailer's checkout.

Retailers receive a handling fee per container to finance the redemption technology (e.g., a reverse vending machine, bag drop, or other technology), and any labor or sorting for taking back used containers. Small retailers with less than 3,000 square feet of sales area or large retailers with 150 square feet or less of shelf space displaying redeemable containers are not required to take back used containers but must post at their entrances the location of the nearest reverse vending machine.

Restaurants, bars, hotels, and large venues where customers consume beverages on the premises pay the deposit when they purchase beverages, but do not pass the deposit on to customers. These "on premises" sellers can obtain a refund when they offer the empty containers for pick-up by the system operator, and a per container materials handling fee per container for the costs of collection and preliminary sorting.

A producer-funded Beverage Container Stewardship Organization operates the program and manages redemption, collection, and recycling of the collected containers, subject to approval of a Stewardship Plan and oversight by the Maryland Department of the Environment. This stewardship model ensures the system is self-financing and relieves local governments of the costs of landfilling, incinerating, and recycling beverage containers that are diverted to the program, as well as cleanup costs. In addition, the bill directs the Chesapeake Bay Trust to administer a dedicated grant program that supports development of beverage container reuse programs, litter reduction, recycling infrastructure, and public water fountains, to reduce the use of single-use water bottles.

The program places no implementation or enforcement obligations on local governments. They may set up their own redemption centers and receive a handling fee for returned containers, if they choose to. Most would realize cost savings from avoiding the collection and processing of beverage container waste or recyclables along with the cost of financing litter clean-ups. However, if a local government documents a net loss attributable to the deposit program, this initiative would provide compensation during the first three years of operation.

The Stewardship Organization would compensate both public and private materials recovery facilities (MRFs) for the costs of collecting, sorting, processing, and transporting all empty unredeemed redeemable beverage containers that they capture, which they may sell and retain the revenue. Curbside recycling programs would continue to operate in Maryland (as they do in all ten states with a bottle bill).

The Program's Targets

The deposit would begin on January 1, 2029. Based on experience in other states, the program should reduce beverage container litter by at least 70-84%. Overall, this objective aims to achieve a 70% redemption rate for beverage containers by December 2030 and a 90% redemption rate by December 2033. The program aims for at least 10% of all beverage containers sold in Maryland to be refillable by December 2038.

The Program's Benefits

SB 342 would reduce the volume of litter and plastic pollution from beverage containers by quadrupling Maryland's recycling rate for beverage containers, from about 25% to at least 90%. It would capture an estimated 3.6 billion additional beverage containers annually in Maryland, including 2.3 billion plastic bottles, thus reducing litter and plastic pollution while diverting those containers to recycling. In addition, this legislation would:

- Increase the availability of high-quality, food-grade materials that can be used to manufacture new beverage containers and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By reducing the production of new cans and bottles from virgin materials, the additional recycling from this program would eliminate 231,707 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent annually, comparable to removing the emissions of more than 50,000 cars from the road.

- Provide cost savings for taxpayers and local governments. Beverage producers would finance the costs of collection and processing of the three-quarters of beverage containers currently disposed of in the waste stream or littered.
- Create new jobs in recycling and servicing redemption technologies. Recycling generated by a deposit program creates five times as many jobs as landfilling or incineration of beverage containers.
- Serve as a launching pad for investments in reusable and refillable beverage containers, further promoting a circular economy and zero waste.
- Pose no burden on taxpayers. The program is self-financing.

The program has overwhelming public support.

A statewide public opinion survey conducted in early 2025 found that 89-91% of registered voters in Maryland would support a beverage container redemption program with a 10-cent refundable deposit on the sale of beverages in plastic, metal, or glass containers, financed and implemented by beverage producers, not taxpayers. The poll also found that 94% of respondents were very concerned (54%) or somewhat concerned (40%) about the environmental impact of beverage container litter and pollution, and that 95% of respondents were very concerned (63%) or somewhat concerned (32%) about the environmental and health impact of plastic beverage containers and pollution in Maryland.

Conclusion

SB 342 would make producers responsible for reducing beverage container litter and plastic pollution, by diverting empty beverage containers from disposal and increasing their recovery for recycling. Last session, the General Assembly took an important step by passing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation, recognizing the need to hold producers responsible for rightsizing packaging, redesigning hard-to-recycle packaging for recyclability and reducing its toxicity. It explicitly states that the passage of the 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) EPR for packaging and beverage container deposit-refund systems work synergistically to maximize the benefits of both programs. The Maryland Bottle Bill advances this progress by offering 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, with the creation of a deposit-return system.

For these reasons I am requesting a favorable report on SB 342.

With kindest regards,



Benjamin Brooks