



NATIONAL AQUARIUM®

Date: February 6, 2026

Bill: SB 342- Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program

Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for SB 342. Enacting the Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program would increase the reuse and recycling of beverage containers, lower waste management costs, and reduce litter and pollution.

In Maryland, 5.5 billion single-use beverage containers are sold every year¹. More than half of these containers are plastic, yet only about a quarter are recycled. The rest end up in landfills, are incinerated, or become litter in our environment. Over time, plastic containers break down into smaller pieces that endanger wildlife, contaminate the global food web, and transport toxins harmful to human health. Most plastic is made from fossil fuels, and every stage of the plastic use cycle contributes to climate change, air pollution and environmental justice concerns. Reducing litter from beverage containers across Maryland is related to all the National Aquarium's strategic conservation goals: saving wildlife and habitats, combatting climate change, and stopping plastic pollution.

The National Aquarium has taken several steps to reduce or eliminate the use of plastic in our facilities, including the elimination of single-use plastic beverage containers from our cafes. The Aquarium also conducts regular debris cleanups, working with dedicated volunteers to pick up over 71,000 plastic beverage containers and caps from the environment over the last five years. As just one of the many organizations in Maryland that conduct regular debris cleanups, this figure underscores the need for a comprehensive change in our approach to waste management that includes passing the Maryland Bottle Bill.

Last year the state took a significant step forward by establishing a framework for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging materials, and refundable bottle deposit programs demonstrably complement EPR for other packaging materials². Bottle deposit programs currently operate in ten other U.S. states and several other countries and are highly effective in recovering beverage containers, increasing recycling rates, and reducing both litter and associated costs of mitigation. Maryland funds several grant programs to support litter removal, and the Maryland Department of Transportation estimates spending approximately \$8 million annually to remove truckloads of litter, including beverage containers, from roadways. Marylanders' time, capacity, as well as millions of dollars could be better allocated by reducing how many beverage containers become litter.

¹ Container Recycling Institute (CRI). "2024 Beverage Market Data Analysis (BMDA)"

² 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

Maryland should follow the lead of several other states and enact a beverage container deposit return system. This is a critical and cost-effective step towards a cleaner and healthier future for all Marylanders. **We strongly urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 342.**

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