



Trash Free Maryland
3717 Boston St., #242
Baltimore, MD 21224

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on: SB342 – Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 10, 2026

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

Trash Free Maryland strongly supports SB342 – Maryland Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program. This legislation would create a recycling refund for beverage containers sold in our state (also known as a “bottle bill” or “deposit-return-system”) to reduce litter and improve recycling quantity and commodity quality in our state. The program does this while being funded by producers – shifting financial responsibility for beverage container waste upstream from local governments and taxpayers to the producers – and designed to maximize redemption rates and litter reduction for covered beverage containers.

Trash Free Maryland is a nonprofit organization that works with communities across the state to achieve our vision of a Maryland free of trash and litter, where lands and waterways are safe and healthy for all to enjoy. We partner with statewide and local anti-litter and watershed protection organizations to identify problematic and significant contributors to litter and to develop effective policy solutions to prevent the most prevalent types of litter at the source. Our Trash Free Maryland Coalition collaborates to educate and unite communities and decisionmakers behind evidence-based policies. We support the bottle bill because bottle bills have proven to be highly impactful on litter in the U.S. and globally.

We can benefit from the decades of bottle bill experience as well as new bottle bill programs and emerging redemption technologies just beginning to be implemented.¹ SB342 is unique and targeted to Maryland’s needs. This bill benefits from extensive stakeholder conversations, best practices and lessons learned from the ten U.S. bottle bill states, and experience from recycling refund programs worldwide. Importantly, it is designed for optimal consumer convenience to maximize redemption rates and litter reduction. This highly effective program will also improve recycling rates and quality as well as help build essential foundations for expanding future reuse and refill opportunities. These are all components of a necessary reduction and transition away from single-use packaging.

What did Maryland’s 2025 Recycling Needs Assessment say about the bottle bill?

¹ The Status of EPR-PPP and DRS Around the World, Container Recycling Institute, October 2025, https://www.container-recycling.org/images/2026/CRI_EPR-DRS-Factsheet-Oct-1-2025.pdf. Summarizing the worldwide status of jurisdictions and year of implementation of extended producer responsibility for packaging, container deposit return systems, or both. Notably, fourteen jurisdictions with fully implemented EPR are now beginning DRS.

In February 2025, Maryland’s Department of the Environment (MDE) published the Maryland Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment, which included analysis of the state’s recycling infrastructure and performance as well as projections of future recycling performance under a possible future extended producer responsibility system for packaging and paper products (EPR-PPP). Citing the 2023 Eunomia and Ball Corporation “50 States of Recycling Report,” the Needs Assessment noted that states with bottle bills have high redemption rates (52%-91%) while also having curbside recycling programs in place.² MDE estimated in the Recycling Needs Assessment that Maryland’s recycling rate for Paper and Packaging Products (PPP) could increase from 34% to 50% or greater with an EPR for packaging program.³

Although Maryland’s Needs Assessment scope did not include a detailed future state analysis of a bottle bill alone or EPR plus a bottle bill, the Needs Assessment did note, “EPR and bottle bills complement each other by incentivising materials management in a way that results in a high quality feedstock, which allow materials to be utilized at their highest and best use. Importantly, bottle bills are able to effectively drive demand for recycled feedstock which ultimately results in increased recycling performance.”⁴

Maryland’s Needs Assessment also described modeling in Eunomia’s landmark 2023 “50 States of Recycling” report for the Ball Corporation which found that EPR for packaging combined with a bottle bill resulted in higher recycling rates for rigid plastic, aluminum, and glass. The 50 States of Recycling report analyzed the current state of recycling in all 50 U.S. states, and included two case studies from Washington and Colorado modeling future scenarios of recycling and economic impacts of EPR for packaging alone (“EPR-PPP”) or EPR for packaging plus recycling refund (“EPR-PPP + RR”).⁵ Washington’s baseline recycling rate was 26%, EPR alone had an estimated peak recycling rate of 59%, and EPR plus recycling refund had an accelerated progress to reach 79% recycling rate by year 9. The findings for Colorado were similar: baseline 11%, EPR alone 49%, and EPR plus recycling refund reaching 82%. The findings were unequivocal that EPR plus recycling refunds deliver better performance at a faster pace and deliver maximum recycling rates compared to either program alone.⁶ Maryland’s baseline of 34% and projected 50% recycling with EPR alone could be improved by adding a complementary beverage container recycling refund with benefits to our overall recycling rates and cobenefits in litter reduction, jobs, and reuse.

How will extended producer responsibility for packaging and the bottle bill work together?

Since this body’s passage of extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging legislation in 2025, we have an exciting opportunity to improve and accelerate recycling in our state through the

² Maryland Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment, Maryland Department of the Environment, p.5 (https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/RMP/Documents/Statewide%20Recycling%20Needs%20Assessment%20Final%20Report_PDF.pdf). As part of the project team, Eunomia Research and Consulting, Inc. (“Eunomia”) led the development of the baseline and future state modeling for the Needs Assessment.

³ *Id.*, at p.6.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ 50 States of Recycling 2.0, Ball Corporation and Eunomia Research and Consulting, 2023. The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of US Packaging Recycling Rates, https://www.ball.com/getmedia/dffa01b0-3b52-4b90-a107-541ece7ee07c/50-STATES_2023-V14.pdf

⁶ 50 States of Recycling 2.0: A State-by-State Assessment of 2021 Containers and Packaging Recycling Rates, December 2023, Summary Powerpoint, https://www.ball.com/getmedia/4a9625c4-32d8-44df-a8af-e2d443f0668f/50-States-of-Recycling-2-0-Summary-Deck_FIN AL.pdf, at p.31.

implementation of a complementary beverage container recycling refund program. Packaging EPR will help finance improvements to our residential curbside recycling programs, but the bottle bill will help capture beverage containers that are consumed away from home and on-the-go by creating a cash incentive for people to collect them and return for recycling. Curbside programs will continue, but our state will benefit from production of cleaner commodity streams and more complete capture of recyclable materials. Local governments and service providers will have access to reimbursements from the packaging EPR system, ensuring that taxpayers and local governments aren't left holding the bill for maintaining recycling programs. Curbside recycling, disposal, and deposit-return programs all cost money; the choice is whether government, taxpayers, or producers pay for the systems we need to manage our packaging waste.

Curbside programs do not capture all of the recyclable beverage containers, and especially struggle to capture containers consumed away from home. Plastic bottles have been increasing in proportion relative to aluminum cans, and curbside programs now must cover costs of collecting and processing not only high value aluminum cans, but also low value mixed glass and plastic containers. The bottle bill would remove much of this cumbersome material from the recycling stream, saving capacity in local recycling programs. Nondeposit containers are a subsidy by taxpayers to the producers – a hidden tax.

We need to act now on the plastic pollution crisis. Systemic policy changes will be needed to turn the tide on plastic production and pollution. Implementing a bottle bill to reduce litter and support pathways to reuse and refill would follow in Maryland's proud tradition of leadership and legislative action on problematic and avoidable sources of litter, such as our nation-leading ban on polystyrene foam food packaging and plastic microbeads. Foam food packaging clamshell containers used to be prevalent in our litter cleanups. We are thrilled to report that the quantities we find have fallen substantially since Maryland implemented a targeted policy to reduce foam litter. We know how effective bottle bills can be for litter reduction. We look forward to a day when we can report back that we are finding significantly fewer littered beverage containers in our cleanups. The bottle will help us get closer to our trash free vision.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on SB342 to give our state the best chance for full realization of the benefits of beverage container producer responsibility.

Contact: Kelly Doordan (kelly@trashfreemaryland.org), Executive Director, Trash Free Maryland



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony On: SB342 - Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 10, 2026

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

We enthusiastically support SB342 – Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program. SB342 would set up a recycling refund program for beverage containers to reduce one of the most prevalent sources of litter in Maryland. The most effective recycling programs in the United States are in states where consumers can get a refund in exchange for returning their beverage container for recycling, and SB342 would

bring the most effective aspects of this proven litter reduction policy to Maryland.

Adding cash value to empty beverage containers provides a proven incentive for consumers to return empty containers for recycling. Importantly, this same incentive applies to containers consumed at home and on-the-go, providing a mechanism to ensure that even containers consumed away from home are returned for recycling rather than trashed or littered.

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.¹
- 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 without a recycling refund program recycle only 17% of their plastic bottles on average.²
- 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.³
- 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.⁴
- 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.⁵

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

¹ Keep America Beautiful 2020 National Litter Study <https://kab.org/litter-study>

² National Stewardship Action Foundation and Eunomia State of the States Report 2021

³ The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of Containers and Packaging Recycling Rates 2021

⁴ Glass Packaging Institute 2024

⁵ 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>

“that’s more than \$68 million” spent on litter in 5 years.⁶ 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 beverage container recycling refunds and are now implementing complementary deposit return systems alongside their packaging programs.⁷ 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 these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on SB342.

Contact: Kelly Doordan, Trash Free Maryland (kelly@trashfreemaryland.org)

Trash Free Maryland
Anacostia Riverkeeper
Audubon Mid-Atlantic
Audubon Society of Central Maryland
Blue Water Baltimore
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Environmental Justice Ministry
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Clean Water Action
Climate Reality Greater Maryland

⁶ Maryland State Highway Administration, Litter Removal, Cost of Litter, <https://roads.maryland.gov/mdotsha/pages/index.aspx?PageId=358> (accessed February 2026)

⁷ 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

Corsica River Conservancy
Elders Climate Action Maryland
Green Sanctuary of Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring
Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake
Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Legislative Coalition - Climate Justice Wing
Mr. Trash Wheel
National Wildlife Federation
Nature Forward
Potomac Conservancy
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Rock Creek Conservancy
Safe Skies Maryland
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
Surfrider Foundation
The Severn River Association
Vernal Pools Partners
Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore
Waterkeepers Chesapeake