



February 10, 2026

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair  
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Favorable Support for SB 342, An act creating the Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program, with suggested changes.**

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

I am writing on behalf of the The Story of Stuff Project to express our strong support for SB 342 which will establish a refundable deposit on beverage containers and result in higher recycling rates and bringing reusable beverage containers back to the beverage industry. The Story of Stuff Project is a national U.S. based nonprofit organization with more than a million Changemakers worldwide, including nearly 1,000 supporters in the state of Maryland. Our mission is to change the way we make, use, and throw away all the Stuff in our lives.

**It's time for Maryland to have a bottle bill!** With only about a quarter of the more than 5.5 billion beverage containers sold in Maryland collected for recycling, 4 billion one-way beverage containers litter roadways, pollute the environment with microplastics, and are burned or buried, wasting precious resources. It's time to address the beverage container waste stream more seriously. *The state has been considering adopting a deposit to beverage containers since the 1970s.* Bottle deposits are the best way to ensure that beverage containers get returned for recycling and don't become litter. States with bottle bills that have high enough deposits (10 cents) and convenient return options have reached 90% return rates.<sup>1</sup> A beverage container deposit return program is long overdue in Maryland.

**The beverage industry, which claims they want "every bottle back," has been fighting bottle bills for over 50 years.**<sup>2</sup> Ever since the 1960s when the industry moved out of refillable bottles into single-use aluminum and then plastic, our streets and rivers started to become littered. The fight for responsible management of beverage containers has been going on since the 1970s, but due to industry opposition, only 10 states have succeeded in enacting bottle bills to date. If the American beverage industry (valued at \$170 billion for non-alcoholic beverages<sup>3</sup> and \$17 billion for alcoholic beverages<sup>4</sup>) was serious about wanting *every bottle back* they would support these bills and help ensure that the best in class return systems are established. The truth is that,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/current-and-proposed-laws/usa/additional-links>

<sup>2</sup> The "Every Bottle Back" initiative is a collaborative campaign launched in 2019 by America's leading beverage companies - Coca-Cola Company, Keurig Dr Pepper and PepsiCo —<https://cocacolaunited.com/blog/2019/10/31/top-us-beverage-companies-unite-for-every-bottle-back-initiative/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/u-s-non-alcoholic-beverages-market-107932#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20non%20alcoholic%20beverages,U.S.%20non%20alcoholic%20beverages%20market>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.statfacts.com/outlook/us-alcoholic-beverage-market>

despite being so profitable, they'd rather pay lobbyists to fight bottle bills than pay a little money to retailers and recyclers to establish successful recycling programs.

**Affordability? We can't afford NOT to have a bottle bill.** The proposed 10 cent deposit is fully refundable. Research shows that at 10 cents, with a convenient collection system, states can achieve a 90% return rate- meaning most people get their money back. It's not a tax. Not having a refundable deposit system that reduces litter and plastic entering the environment results in enormous burdens - *essentially taxing our communities with the costs of litter, waste management, and the adverse health impacts of plastics and associated chemicals.*

When empty beverage containers can be redeemed for cash, few are littered or likely to remain littered. According to the Container Recycling Institute, a deposit program in Maryland would capture 3.6 billion additional beverage containers annually, including 2.3 billion plastic bottles. These are just some of the costs that a beverage container deposit system will reduce:

- **Roadside litter spending-** the Maryland Department of Transportation and State Highway Administration reported that in 2024, MDOT SHA spent over \$17 million on cleaning up litter from state highways, with total expenditures exceeding \$68 million over the past five years.<sup>5</sup> Municipalities spend millions more. Baltimore City alone spends over \$32 million annually to collect over 2,600 tons of litter.<sup>6</sup>
- **The costs of stormwater control-** as a result of the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirement, local governments are already spending too much money controlling trash entering Maryland waterways- *half of which is beverage containers* according to data from the Anacostia Watershed Society.<sup>7</sup>
- **Solid waste spending.** Maryland cities and counties are spending significant, multi-million dollar amounts on solid waste management, with budgets in major jurisdictions exceeding \$100 million annually, based on 2025 and 2026 budgets.<sup>8</sup> The cost to recycle paper and other packaging prior to producer responsibility was \$406,433,000<sup>9</sup>- this doesn't include the costs of landfill and incineration of waste and other types of waste, including organics, construction, and textile waste.
- **The economic impacts of microplastics' harm to human health-** a recent study published in the *Journal of the Endocrine Society* estimates the health care costs attributable to chemicals in plastics in the United States are on the order of \$250 billion/year, or 1.22% of our gross domestic product.<sup>10</sup> Another peer-reviewed review of

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<sup>5</sup> <https://roads.maryland.gov/mdotsha/pages/index.aspx?PageId=358>

<sup>6</sup> <https://mayor.baltimorecity.gov/news/press-releases/2022-11-21-city-baltimore-files-first-its-kind-lawsuit-against-tobacco-companies#:~:text=Every%20year%2C%20millions%20of%20cigarette,the%20cost%20of%20cigarette%20cleanup.>

<sup>7</sup> [Anacostia Riverkeeper \(2023\) Anacostia River Trash Mitigation Report, p.8](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Montgomery County](#): The approved FY26 operating budget for Recycling and Resource Management is \$192.1 million, a 24% increase from FY25 (\$154.8 million). [Prince George's County](#): The FY25 approved Solid Waste Management Enterprise Fund budget for the Department of the Environment is \$125.2 million. [Baltimore County](#): The Department of Public Works and Transportation's FY25 proposed budget for waste-related services includes \$193.5 million.

<sup>9</sup> [MDEP \(2025\) Maryland Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment](#), p.111

<sup>10</sup> [Trasande L, Krithivasan R, Park K, Obsekov V, Belliveau M. Chemicals used in plastic materials: an estimate of the attributable disease burden and costs in the United States. J Endocr Soc. 2024;8\(2\):bvad163.](#)

the health and economic impacts of plastic pollution in the highly respected *Lancet* Journal:

*Plastics are a grave, growing, and under-recognised danger to human and planetary health. Plastics cause disease and death from infancy to old age and are responsible for health-related economic losses exceeding US \$1.5 trillion annually. These impacts fall disproportionately upon low-income and at-risk populations. The principal driver of this crisis is accelerating growth in plastic production—from 2 megatonnes (Mt) in 1950, to 475 Mt in 2022 that is projected to be 1200 Mt by 2060. Plastic pollution has also worsened, and 8000 Mt of plastic waste now pollutes the planet.<sup>11</sup>*

Given the linked and increasing crises of climate change and plastic pollution, action to collect single-use beverage containers for recycling and to transition to reusable beverage containers is long overdue. **By targeting 10% reuse and ensuring that there is funding to establish reuse infrastructure this bill recognizes the myriad benefits of bringing back reusable beverage containers.** In the 1960s, the beverage industry in the U.S. made the switch from reusable bottles that it collected, washed and refilled, to single-use cans and bottles that became a waste stream local government and communities had to deal with. But this isn't true in much of the world. Refillable beverage containers are still used by the beverage industry in 170 countries worldwide with reusables representing an overall market share of 23% by volume globally.<sup>12</sup> Most of the top 10 global non-alcoholic beverage markets, including China, Mexico, Indonesia, India, Brazil, Germany, and Turkey have reusable market shares ranging from 26% - 61%.<sup>13</sup>

Recycling alone isn't enough. Globally, more than 580 billion polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic beverage bottles are produced each year – *nearly 1 million per minute*, which accounts for one-quarter of the world's use of PET plastic. Transitioning to reusable bottles is imperative to reduce materials, water, waste, and climate impacts. Reuse can reduce up to 40% of raw materials inputs and 50% of greenhouse gas emissions associated with beverage packaging. It also achieves lower water and waste impacts. Coca-Cola's Universal PET bottle compared to a single-use bottle was found to reduce carbon emissions up to 47% and the water footprint by 45%. After a third use, reusable glass bottles are already less impactful than single-use glass, PET or aluminum cans. Used 25 times and then recycled, reusable glass bottles create 85% fewer climate emissions than single-use glass; 57% fewer than aluminum cans; and 70% fewer than single-use PET.<sup>14</sup>

Reusables also benefit the ocean and local water waterways. *Oceana estimates that a 10% increase in the share of beverages sold in reusables could result in a 22% decrease in marine plastic pollution, keeping 4.5 to 7.6 billion plastic bottles out of the ocean each year.*

**Suggestions to Improve the Reuse Provisions of the bill.** We support this bill as is, however, if the author and committee members wish to see reuse succeed in the state, a best in class

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<sup>11</sup> **The Lancet Countdown on health and plastics**, Landrigan, Philip J et al., *The Lancet*, Volume 406, Issue 10507, 1044 - 1062 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(25\)01447-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(25)01447-3/fulltext)

<sup>12</sup> [Oceana \(2023\). Refill Again.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Reloop \(2021\) What We Waste.](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Coelho, P., Corona, B., Worell, E. \(2020\). Reusable vs. single-use packaging: a review of environmental impacts. Reloop and Zero Waste Europe](#)

version of the reuse targets would make the following changes:

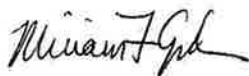
1. Updated definitions for reusable beverage containers, making a clear distinction between *returnable reusables*, which are returned to producers or third party service providers for professional cleaning and recirculation (for example, a reusable beer bottle returned to a redemption center and transported back to a brewery), and *refillables*, which are owned by consumers and are not subject to deposits (for example, a growler refilled by a consumer at a local brewery).
2. Without penalties for failure to achieve the target reuse rates, there is virtually no accountability built into the reuse requirement.
3. Requirements for reverse vending machines and redemption centers to accept returnable reusables wherever recyclables are accepted, without crushing reusable glass containers.
4. Allowances for producers choosing returnable reusables to increase the deposit on these containers if they wish (to ensure they get them back).
5. A requirement for the beverage stewardship organization and Maryland's packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) producer responsibility organization (PRO) to coordinate so that reuse outcomes across both programs are optimized.
6. A requirement that retailers provide shelf space for reusable beverage containers to ensure that consumers have equal access to reusables alongside single-use containers.

**The Single-Use Plastic Problem Necessitates Immediate Action.** Single-use plastic beverage containers pollute our waterways and pose a threat to wildlife and human health. As described in the cited plastics articles, plastics are invading our lives. Micro and nano plastics are in the air we breathe, water we drink, and food we eat. They are found in all the major organs of the human body, including the brain at an average of 10 micrograms- or two teaspoons- of plastic are present. While we don't fully understand the impacts to human health- it clearly does not belong in our bodies or in the crops we grow and water we drink.

**Increasing recycling and adding refillables is good for Maryland's economy.** The beverage deposit program would shift the financial burden of managing beverage container waste from local governments to the producers of beverages that profit from selling beverages. Recycling generated from that deposit program is estimated to create 5 times as many jobs as landfilling or incineration. Reuse creates even more jobs as additional jobs are created for sorting and washing refillable beverage bottles.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote AYE on this important measure. Please feel free to contact me at [miriam@storyofstuff.org](mailto:miriam@storyofstuff.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



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