



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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## House Bill 331

### Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program

<b>Date:</b> February 11, 2026	<b>Position:</b> <b>FAVORABLE</b>
<b>To:</b> Environment & Transportation Committee Economic Matters Committee	<b>From:</b> Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS House Bill 331** would set up a recycling refund program for beverage containers to reduce one of the most prevalent sources of litter in Maryland. This is a tried-and-true method of litter reduction, and HB 331 applies lessons learned from other successful state programs.

#### **Most plastic beverage containers in Maryland are not recycled, and current disposal processes worsen human and environmental health:**

Although recycling programs have existed in Maryland for many years, less than one-quarter of the 5.2 billion beverage containers sold in the state in 2019 were recycled and reused.<sup>1</sup> The remaining 4 billion containers were landfilled, incinerated, or littered. This is a large waste of resources, as virgin plastic requires large amounts of fossil fuels, the extraction and burning of which result in higher greenhouse gas emissions and energy use. Incineration of plastic bottles also worsens Maryland's air quality, releasing nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, and other pollutants that impact human health and affect the acidity and balance of our Chesapeake Bay.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Plastic beverage bottles contribute to microplastic pollution and environmental damages:**

Contrary to the popular belief that plastic pollution largely ends up in the ocean, most of the plastic pollution that makes its way into the rivers of the Chesapeake Bay stays in and along local waters. Indeed, about 94% of microplastics – particles measuring 5 millimeters or less in diameter – that feed into the system via its rivers stay in the system, with an additional 5% carried to the ocean and 1% remaining in the water column.<sup>3</sup>

Microplastics threaten the health of the biodiversity that lives within the Bay watershed. For example, microplastics can physically block or fill up an animal's gut, potentially reducing its ability or desire to feed. Microplastics can also cause behavioral changes as their presence changes a fish's buoyancy or swimming behavior, which can make the fish more susceptible to predators. Microplastics also can carry toxic chemicals into the fish's body, which could bioaccumulate as the fish consumes other prey that have

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<sup>1</sup> Container Recycling Institute, 2022. "2019 Beverage Market Data Analysis."

<sup>2</sup> "CBF Study: Baltimore Incinerator Causes \$55 Million in Health Problems per Year." *Chesapeake Bay Foundation*, 11 Dec. 2017, [Study: Baltimore Trash Incinerator Causes \\$55 Million in Health Problems | Chesapeake Bay Magazine](#)

<sup>3</sup> Pipkin, Whitney. "The Chesapeake Bay Is a 'Sink' for Plastic Pollution." *Bay Journal*, Bay Journal Media, 13 Oct. 2021, [https://www.bayjournal.com/news/pollution/the-chesapeake-bay-is-a-sink-for-plastic-pollution/article\\_ca6f12ec-21fd-11ec-b0c4-cf096494dd62.html](https://www.bayjournal.com/news/pollution/the-chesapeake-bay-is-a-sink-for-plastic-pollution/article_ca6f12ec-21fd-11ec-b0c4-cf096494dd62.html).

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*The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.*

ingested plastics, and eventually make its way to human consumption.<sup>4</sup> All of these factors threaten the health of our ecosystem, as well as threaten the longevity and safety of Maryland's seafood industry.

**Beverage container deposit programs are a proven, highly effective policy for recovering used beverage containers and reducing litter:**

Ten states in the U.S., covering about 90 million people, have longstanding, successful beverage container deposit programs (California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Vermont).<sup>5</sup> Together, they average a 60% recycling rate for beverage containers, compared to 24% in states without these programs.<sup>6</sup> The recycling rate for deposit beverage containers is much higher than for containers not subject to a deposit, and it increases with a higher deposit amount. The two states that offer a 10-cent redemption refund, Michigan and Oregon, have the highest beverage bottle recycling rates in the nation, reaching 73%<sup>7</sup> and 87% recycling rates in 2023<sup>8</sup>, respectively.

**Beverage container deposit programs make financial sense for our local and state governments.:**

Beverage container deposit programs do not add cost burdens to our state, but rather can provide significant savings, which is especially important considering Maryland's budget constraints. Beverage producers would finance the costs of collection, processing, and recycling of beverage containers currently disposed, littered, and recycled, diverting materials from landfills and incinerators, saving costs for taxpayers and local governments. The reduction of disposed materials is critical, as Maryland counties are dedicating much time and resources to extend the capacity of their almost-full landfills.<sup>9</sup>

Recycling is also beneficial for job creation in the state. Indeed, deposit programs create 11 to 38 times more jobs than a curbside recycling system for beverage containers and at least five times more jobs in container collection, sorting, and transport than in garbage collecting, hauling and landfilling.<sup>10</sup>

**CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 331.** For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at [mstegman@cbf.org](mailto:mstegman@cbf.org).

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<sup>4</sup> Pipkin, Whitney. "Picture of Chesapeake Microplastics Grows Clearer." *Bay Journal*, Bay Journal Media, 7 June 2021, [https://www.bayjournal.com/news/pollution/picture-of-chesapeake-microplastics-grows-clearer/article\\_87bd3606-c3e1-11eb-bdc4-4f1a3864c6f9.html](https://www.bayjournal.com/news/pollution/picture-of-chesapeake-microplastics-grows-clearer/article_87bd3606-c3e1-11eb-bdc4-4f1a3864c6f9.html).

<sup>5</sup> "Redemption Rates and Other Features of 10 U.S. State Deposit Programs." *Bottle Bill Resource Guide*, Container Recycling Institute, <https://www.bottlebill.org/images/Allstates/10-state%20Summary%208-5-22r.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> "Bottle Bills", Container Recycling Institute, <https://www.container-recycling.org/index.php/issues/bottle-bills>.

<sup>7</sup> "Michigan." *Bottle Bill Resource Guide*, Container Recycling Institute, <https://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/current-and-proposed-laws/usa/michigan>.

<sup>8</sup> "Oregon." *Bottle Bill Resource Guide*, Container Recycling Institute, <https://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/current-and-proposed-laws/usa/oregon>.

<sup>9</sup> "Olszewski Announces Plans to Consider Vertical Expansion of Eastern Sanitary Landfill to Extend Site Longevity by up to 20 Years." *Olszewski Announces Plans to Consider Vertical Expansion of Eastern Sanitary Landfill to Extend Site Longevity by up to 20 Years | Baltimore County Government*, Baltimore County Government, 22 Jan. 2024, [www.baltimorecountymd.gov/county-news/2024/01/22/olszewski-announces-plans-to-consider-vertical-expansion-of-eastern-sanitary-landfill-to-extend-site-longevity-by-up-to-20-years](http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/county-news/2024/01/22/olszewski-announces-plans-to-consider-vertical-expansion-of-eastern-sanitary-landfill-to-extend-site-longevity-by-up-to-20-years).

<sup>10</sup> "Fact Sheet: Deposit Return Systems Create More Jobs." *ReLoop*, 5 Feb. 2021, [www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/DRS-Factsheet-Jobs-5FEB2021.pdf](http://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/DRS-Factsheet-Jobs-5FEB2021.pdf).