



House Bill 331 Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program Written Testimony

Date: February 11, 2026

Support

Submitted to: Environment and Transportation Committee
Submitted by: Dr. Jana Davis, President, Chesapeake Bay Trust

This legislation and the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Chesapeake Bay Trust, a community-based, nonprofit grant-making organization established by the Maryland General Assembly, is named in this legislation as the administrator of the Beverage Container Recycling Refund Grant Program (Grant Program; section 9-1750). The Trust supports being tapped for this role. Given our ongoing grant-making work in the litter reduction/removal/materials reuse space, the Trust will be able to quickly, efficiently, and cost-effectively establish the Grant Program.

Background:

The Trust recognizes that the primary goal of this legislation is not revenue generation, but instead reduction of litter and concentration of recyclable material through a program that encourages adoptable change in behavior of individual citizens, a tactic shown to be successful in many similar cases in the literature. The materials of focus in this legislation are some of the most common components of litter and are a primary component of trash that ends up in streams, rivers and ultimately the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays, as reported by our grantees who administer stream and river trash clean-up programs. With trash designated as a regulated pollutant under the “Trash TMDL” established for the Anacostia River and Baltimore Harbor, the reduction of trash has emerged as a requirement that local governments must address in their Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) permits. Bottle deposits, as have been demonstrated in other states, reduce the improper disposal and generation of trash at the source, with individual consumers, and are known to be more cost-effective than downstream trash interception technologies, which are expensive to install, and labor-intensive trash pick-up efforts.

Use of Funds for Recycling, Community Cleanup Activities:

The Trust would allocate these funds to promote recycling; reduce reliance on single-use containers (water fountains/water bottle refilling, glass bottle washing for reuse); reduce litter; and promote community clean up and greening projects. The work would be funded through

competitive grant program(s), the infrastructure of which already exists. We anticipate great interest in this work as well as by members of the Thomas V. Mike Miller Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Program, established in 2010 by the General Assembly to engage youth in career development.

The Trust already issues grants for work in this arena: Many of the grants awarded by the Trust currently provide funds to local communities to conduct trash clean-up activities (downstream solutions) and change behaviors that lead to litter in the first place (upstream solutions). Clean-up projects supported by the Trust already remove 70,000 to 100,000 pounds of trash annually from neighborhoods and local waterways across Maryland. The goal is to put this downstream element of our work out of business through the education/behavior change upstream element of our work enhanced through this bill.

With the funds generated under this legislation, the Trust would:

- Increase grant-making to community groups and other nonprofits, schools, local governments, for-profit entities, and others for recycling and reuse efforts, taking lessons learned from the “Ditch the Disposables” grant program we managed for Washington D.C. (with D.C. resources).
- Increase grant-making for local trash clean-up efforts;
- Increase support for public education programs about the importance of recycling, reuse, and trash and litter reduction,
- Increase community-based natural resources work generally across the State, which creates jobs in local communities. Analysis of Trust grant-making indicates that approximately 60% of the grant funds are used to directly engage for-profit entities from suppliers to nurseries to landscape firms and more, supporting hundreds of jobs each year.

Trash issues are named as one of the most important environmental issues in many types of neighborhoods, but particularly in predominantly low-income neighborhoods, making litter an environmental justice issue. Studies indicate that communities that are greener and cleaner experience greater human health, reduced crime, and greater economic vitality. The Trust would direct a significant portion of the resources to grants that aim to reduce trash in, green, and beautify urban communities.

About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a nonprofit grant-making organization with a goal to empower community-based groups to play a role in the restoration of the state’s local rivers, streams, parks, and other natural resources in diverse communities across the state, from the mountains of Western Maryland and the Youghiogheny watershed to the marshes of the Coastal Bays. The goal was to create an entity that



complements state agency work by empowering groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based and reach large institutions, homeowners associations, community and civic associations, and other types of groups.

The Trust is known for its efficiency, putting more than 90 cents of every dollar into programs. The Trust has awarded close to \$200m through 13,000 grants and projects in every county in Maryland. We now average about 500 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active awardees at any one time.

The Trust does not receive a direct state appropriation to support its operations, instead supported through revenue from the Chesapeake Bay vehicle license plate; half of the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund checkoff on the state income tax form; two new donation options through Maryland’s online boating, fishing, hunting license system, one that focuses on veterans’ rehabilitation; partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, family foundations, and corporate foundations; and individual donors.

Due to its efficiency, the Trust has been rated with the maximum four-star rating by the nation’s leading charity evaluator, Charity Navigator, for more than two decades, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust’s basic tenets in its strategic plan is to engage under-engaged audiences in natural resources issues. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources.

