



Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony On: HB331 - Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 11, 2026

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

We enthusiastically support HB331 – Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program. HB331 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 HB331 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 HB331 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.
- HB331 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 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 "that's more

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>

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. HB331 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 HB331.

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 Aquarium
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