



The Earth Ministry
River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation
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Committee: House Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB 331
Position: Favorable
Hearing date: February 11, 2026

The Earth Ministry of River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Bethesda MD strongly supports The Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program, commonly known as the Maryland Bottle Bill. It seeks to reduce pollution from glass, metal and plastic beverage containers and to boost recycling. Plastic bottles are what most concern us.

Our members hear the steady drumbeat of alarming news about microplastic pollution from plastic bottles and other plastic. Beverage containers made from plastic are the fastest growing category in this bill. World-wide, a million plastic bottles are purchased every minute, the UN Environment Program said— back in 2018. In the US, plastic water bottle sales increased from 3 billion in 1997 to 86 billion in 2021, a 25-fold increase. Of those, just 29% were recycled.¹ In Maryland, this bill would capture an additional 2.3 billion plastic bottles a year² which currently end up in landfills, incinerators or littered. The bill will also capture plastic bottles used for soda, juices, milk and more.

Plastic does not decompose and return to nature. Over time it just breaks down into ever smaller pieces called micro- and nanoplastics. A warming planet accelerates the breakdown, making microplastics more persistent, more mobile and more hazardous.³ And the past three years have been the hottest on record. Microplastics are now found throughout our air, land and water, the animal kingdom and our own bodies and internal organs. Our Unitarian Universalist faith specifically directs us to “respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

Some of our members have viewed *Plastic People*, an award-winning 2024 feature-length documentary about the growing threat of microplastics on human health. One such threat is cardiac. A study in the March 4, 2024, *New England Journal of Medicine* looked at carotid artery plaque from 257 patients and found that 58% contained plastic. Over the next three years, patients with plastic had twice as many heart attacks, strokes or death from any cause.

The pace of bad news picked up last year. “Plastics cause disease and death from infancy to old age and are responsible for health-related economic losses exceeding \$1.5 billion [worldwide],” *Lancet* medical magazine reported in August 2025. And a study of brain tissue

¹ Container Recycling Institute, Beverage Market Data Analysis, based on 2021 data.

² Sierra Club, Maryland Chapter. Beverage Container Recycling Litter Reduction Coalition Fact Sheet.

³ phys.org/news/2025-11-plastic-pollution-worsened-climate-stemmed.html

from cadavers found plastics in all of them. But those who had died with dementia had three to five times higher concentrations, says a study in Nature Magazine, February 2025.

“The year has been full of scary details about the tiny particles...for many scientists, 2025 was the year of microplastics,” The Washington Post reported this January 4. Meanwhile, seven state governors called on EPA to launch nationwide monitoring of plastic particles in drinking water last December.

Not surprisingly, entrepreneurs are now marketing low-cost consumer test kits to check for plastic in food and water. And anxious consumers are turning to unproven therapies to remove microplastics from their bodies, a front-page article in the October 19, 2025 Washington Post reports. Therapies include injectable drugs, supplements and blood filtration. Filtration treatments can cost upwards of \$10,000 and take 2-3 hours.

Bottle bills are a *proven* way to reduce dangerous plastic pollution by recycling plastic, glass and metal beverage containers. For more than 50 years, bottle laws have achieved recycling rates up to three times higher than recycling rates in states without bottle laws⁴. And the higher the deposit, the higher the recycling rates. States with a 10-cent deposit have achieved container recycling rates of 90%. Our rate in Maryland is just 25%. And 90% of Maryland voters would support a bottle deposit/return system, according to a Gonzales Research and Media Services poll last year.

Broadly speaking, this bill will remove beverage containers from Maryland’s lawns, streets, highways, parking lots, beaches, bays, rivers and streams. It will improve water quality and save taxpayers and local governments money because producers will shoulder the cost of recycling their beverage containers. And these recycled containers will be cleaner than ones collected in recycling bins. They will be clean enough to recycle into new food and beverage containers, providing additional economic and environmental savings.

Best of all, by keeping plastic bottles out of the environment in the first place, this bill will be a vital step toward addressing the growing health challenges of microplastic pollution. For these reasons, the Earth Ministry of the River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation requests a favorable report on HB 331.

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⁴ Susan Collins, President, Container Recycling Institute, February 14, 2025 testimony on Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program.