



February 11, 2026

Delegate Marc Korman, Chair
Delegate Michele Guyton, Vice Chair
House Environment & Transportation Committee
Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 331, An act creating the Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program, with suggested changes.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Upstream **in support of HB 331**, which will establish a beverage container deposit return system for Maryland with strong targets and incentives for reuse and refill. We are also enclosing some minor suggested updates to the bill language that will ensure the program is workable for anyone choosing reusable containers.

Upstream is a US-based non-profit and leading change agency for the reuse movement in the US and Canada. We spark innovative solutions to help people, communities and businesses shift from single-use to reuse. We believe deposit return systems (DRSs), also known as recycling refunds or bottle bills, are crucial to accelerating the new reuse economy.

HB 331 will establish a DRS for Maryland with strong reuse and refill targets and financial incentives for the beverage sector, which are both crucial to expanding reusable containers. **The beverage sector is ready for a DRS that emphasizes reuse.** Today, beverage reuse systems operate at scale around the world, and virtually all of them use DRSs to get their containers back. These programs not only enjoy higher recovery and recycling rates than Maryland; they also significantly reduce the impacts of beverage packaging. **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. Reusable PET bottles can save up to 40% of the raw materials and 50% of the greenhouse gas emissions compared to the production of single-use PET bottles. Reusables also benefit the ocean: **Oceana estimates that a 10% increase in the**

share of beverages sold in reusables could result in a 22% decrease in marine plastic pollution. This would keep 4.5 to 7.6 *billion* plastic bottles out of the ocean each year.

We suggest the following minor revisions to ensure a clear and workable framework for reusable containers:

- 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).
- Requirements for redemption centers to accept returnable reusables wherever recyclables are accepted, without crushing or otherwise damaging the reusable containers (including via reverse vending machines, which should reject reusables if they cannot avoid crushing them).
- Allowances for producers choosing returnable reusables to increase the deposit on these containers if they wish (to ensure they get them back).
- 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.

These small changes will have major benefits for catalyzing reuse in Maryland's beverage sector. We would be happy to provide specific language if that is helpful, as we have done so in many other states.

Fifty years of data on DRS in the U.S. and around the world demonstrate that refundable deposits are effective at boosting return rates for post-consumer packaging – the single greatest factor in reuse system success. They also create local economic development opportunities and jobs, generate clean streams of recyclable materials through source-separation, and prevent roadside litter and plastic pollution. With the reuse provisions in HB 331, reusable containers will increase in market share and amplify these outcomes. HB 331 will propel Maryland toward a true circular economy with reuse at its core. We thank you for considering this bill and strongly encourage you to support it. For any questions, please contact me at sydney@upstreamolutions.org.

Thank you for all you do,

Sydney Harris
Policy Director, Upstream