



Trash Free Maryland
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Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB331 – Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 11, 2026

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

Trash Free Maryland strongly supports HB331 – Maryland Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program. This legislation would create a recycling refund for beverage containers sold in our state (also known as a “bottle bill” or “deposit-return-system”) to substantially reduce litter and improve recycling quantity and commodity quality in our state. The program does this while being funded by producers – shifting financial responsibility for beverage container waste upstream from local governments and taxpayers to the producers – and designed to maximize redemption rates and litter reduction for covered beverage containers.

Trash Free Maryland is a nonprofit organization that works with organizations and communities across the state to achieve our vision of a Maryland free of trash and litter, where lands and waterways are safe and healthy for all to enjoy. We partner with statewide and local anti-litter and watershed protection organizations to identify problematic and significant contributors to litter and to develop effective policy solutions to prevent the most prevalent types of litter at the source. Our Trash Free Maryland Coalition collaborates to educate and unite communities and decisionmakers behind evidence-based policies. We support the bottle bill because bottle bills have proven to be highly impactful on litter in the U.S. and globally.

We can benefit from the decades of bottle bill experience as well as new bottle bill programs and emerging redemption technologies just beginning to be implemented.¹ HB331 is unique and targeted to Maryland’s needs. This bill benefits from extensive stakeholder conversations, best practices and lessons learned from the ten U.S. bottle bill states, and experience from recycling refund programs worldwide. Importantly, it is designed for optimal consumer convenience to maximize redemption rates, equity, and litter reduction. This highly effective program will also improve recycling rates and quality as well as help build essential foundations for expanding future reuse and refill opportunities. These are all components of a necessary reduction and transition away from single-use packaging.

¹ The Status of EPR-PPP and DRS Around the World, Container Recycling Institute, October 2025, https://www.container-recycling.org/images/2026/CRI_EPR-DRS-Factsheet-Oct-1-2025.pdf. Summarizing the worldwide status of jurisdictions and year of implementation of extended producer responsibility for packaging, container deposit return systems, or both. Notably, fourteen jurisdictions with fully implemented EPR are now beginning DRS.

What did Maryland's 2025 Recycling Needs Assessment say about the bottle bill?

In February 2025, Maryland's Department of the Environment (MDE) published the Maryland Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment, which included analysis of the state's recycling infrastructure and performance as well as projections of future recycling performance under a possible future extended producer responsibility system for packaging and paper products (EPR-PPP). Citing the 2023 Ball Corporation "50 States of Recycling Report" by Eunomia, the Needs Assessment noted that states with bottle bills have high redemption rates (52%-91%) while also having curbside recycling programs in place.² MDE estimated in the Recycling Needs Assessment that Maryland's recycling rate for Paper and Packaging Products (PPP) could increase from 34% to 50% or greater with an EPR for packaging program.³

Although Maryland's Needs Assessment scope did not include a detailed future state analysis comparing a bottle bill alone versus implementation of EPR plus a bottle bill, the Needs Assessment did note, "EPR and bottle bills complement each other by incentivizing materials management in a way that results in a high quality feedstock, which allow materials to be utilized at their highest and best use. Importantly, bottle bills are able to effectively drive demand for recycled feedstock which ultimately results in increased recycling performance."⁴

Maryland's Needs Assessment also described Eunomia's modeling in the "50 States of Recycling" report for Ball finding that EPR for packaging combined with a bottle bill results in higher recycling rates for rigid plastic, aluminum, and glass.⁵ The 50 States of Recycling update report analyzed the current state of packaging recycling in all 50 U.S. states, and included two case studies from Washington and Colorado modeling future scenarios of recycling and economic impacts of EPR for packaging alone ("EPR-PPP") compared to EPR for packaging plus a recycling refund ("EPR-PPP + RR").⁶ Washington's baseline recycling rate was 26%, EPR alone estimated reaching a peak recycling rate of 59%, and EPR plus recycling refund accelerated and enhanced progress to reach a 78% recycling rate by year nine of implementation. The findings for Colorado were similar: baseline 11%, EPR alone 49%, and EPR plus recycling refund reaching 82%. **The findings were clear that EPR plus recycling refunds deliver better performance at a faster pace and deliver maximum recycling rates and co-benefits compared to either program alone.**⁷ We suggest that Maryland's baseline recycling rate of 34% and projected 50% recycling rate under packaging EPR alone could also be further improved by adding a modern beverage container recycling refund to enhance overall recycling rates and achieve co-benefits in litter reduction, jobs, and reuse.

² Maryland Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment, Maryland Department of the Environment, p.5 (https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/RMP/Documents/Statewide%20Recycling%20Needs%20Assessment%20Final%20Report_PDF.pdf). As part of the project team, Eunomia Research and Consulting, Inc. ("Eunomia") led the development of the baseline and future state modeling for the Needs Assessment.

³ *Id.*, at p.6.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ 50 States of Recycling 2.0, Ball Corporation and Eunomia Research and Consulting, 2023. The 50 States of Recycling: A State-by-State Assessment of US Packaging Recycling Rates, https://www.ball.com/getmedia/dffa01b0-3b52-4b90-a107-541ece7ee07c/50-STATES_2023-V14.pdf

⁷ 50 States of Recycling 2.0: A State-by-State Assessment of 2021 Containers and Packaging Recycling Rates, December 2023, Summary Powerpoint, https://www.ball.com/getmedia/4a9625c4-32d8-44df-a8af-e2d443f0668f/50-States-of-Recycling-2-0-Summary-Deck_FIN AL.pdf, at p.31.

How will extended producer responsibility for packaging and the bottle bill work together?

Since this body's passage of extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging legislation in 2025,⁸ Maryland has an exciting opportunity now to improve and accelerate recycling in our state through the implementation of a complementary beverage container recycling refund program. Packaging EPR will help finance improvements and financially offset the loss of beverage containers to our material recovery facilities (recycling centers), more tons will be captured by our recycling programs under EPR, and the bottle bill will help capture beverage containers that are consumed away from home and on-the-go with its cash rebate incentive for people to collect beverage containers and return them for recycling. Curbside programs will continue, but our state will benefit from production of cleaner commodity streams, more complete capture of recyclable materials, and less litter. Local governments and service providers will have access to cost reimbursements from the packaging EPR system, ensuring that taxpayers and local governments aren't left holding the bill for maintaining recycling programs. Curbside recycling, disposal, litter prevention, and deposit-return programs all cost money; the decision is whether the government, taxpayers, or producers pay for managing beverage containers.

Curbside programs do not capture all of the recyclable beverage containers currently, and as you can see by walking down any street in Maryland or looking in any stream, existing recycling programs especially struggle to capture containers consumed away from home. Curbside programs now must cover costs of collecting and processing not only high value aluminum cans, but also lower value mixed glass and plastic containers, often with contamination that can further reduce the commodity value. The bottle bill would remove much of this cumbersome material from the recycling stream, saving capacity in local recycling programs.

We need to act now on the plastic pollution crisis. Systemic policy changes will be needed to turn the tide on plastic production and pollution. Implementing a bottle bill to reduce litter while supporting pathways to reuse and refill would follow in Maryland's proud tradition of leadership and legislative action on problematic and avoidable sources of litter, such as our nation-leading ban on polystyrene foam food packaging and plastic microbeads. Foam food packaging clamshell containers used to be prevalent in our litter cleanups. We are thrilled to report that the quantities we find have fallen substantially since Maryland implemented a targeted policy to reduce foam litter. We know how effective bottle bills can be for litter reduction. We look forward to a day when we can report back that we are finding significantly fewer littered beverage containers in our cleanups. The bottle bill will bring us closer to our trash free vision.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on HB331 to give our state the best chance for full realization of the benefits of beverage container producer responsibility.

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⁸ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/sb0901?ys=2025rs>