



7338 Baltimore Ave
Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740

Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB824 - "Beverage Container Deposit Program – Establishment and Advisory Commission"
Position: Support with Amendments
Hearing Date: February 26, 2020

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB824, with certain clarifying amendments. This bill would require the Maryland Department of the Environment to establish a beverage container deposit program by September 1, 2021. It also would create an Advisory Commission to develop a framework for establishing the program, subject to several parameters and targets, and recommendations for how to implement the program by the designated date.

The Problem

The goal of the proposed program is to remove more than four billion beverage containers annually from Maryland's environment. According to estimates by the Container Recycling Institute (CRI), 5.4 billion beverage containers were sold in Maryland in 2017. However, only about a fifth were recycled and reused.

The balance of more than four billion containers are left in the environment— in landfills, on roadsides, in waterways – or incinerated. Beverage containers comprise 6% of landfilled municipal solid waste in Prince George's County¹ and 8% or more in Wicomico County.² In the Anacostia watershed, beverage containers are nearly half of all of the trash in the waterways by volume (see Exhibit 1). Even counties with high overall recycling rates have low recycling rates for beverage containers because so many are consumed away from home. In Montgomery County, the overall recycling rate in 2012 was 54.8%, but the rates for aluminum cans and plastic bottles were only 19.9% and 17.5%, respectively.

Fixing this problem will have major environmental benefits: increased recycling and reuse of materials; conservation of energy; reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; and reduction of litter on land, in our waterways, the Chesapeake Bay, and the ocean.

The Solution

Ten states have longstanding, highly successful, and cost-effective beverage container deposit programs.³ These programs add a small 5-cent or 10-cent deposit to the purchase of single-use beverage containers that can be redeemed by customers when they are returned for recycling. The programs are generally financed through unredeemed deposits.

These programs have many environmental and economic benefits:⁴

- They provide more opportunities to recycle, especially for people away from home or who live in areas where curbside recycling is unavailable;

¹ SCS Engineers. "Waste Characterization Study, 2014/2015." Waste Management Division, Prince George's County, Maryland.

² EA Engineering, Science, and Technology, Inc. 2014. "Waste Composition Study: Newland Park Landfill, Wicomico County, Maryland." July, Table 3.

³ California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Vermont.

⁴ <http://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/about-bottle-bills/benefits-of-bottle-bills>

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- They provide financial incentives for recycling and produce high-quality recyclable materials, with minimum contamination;⁵
- They prevent litter,⁶ reduce waste, and minimize the environmental impact of beverage containers;
- They encourage producer and consumer responsibility and create jobs; and
- They provide substantial cost savings for counties and municipalities by diverting container waste from landfills and reducing the number of beverage containers placed in curbside collection.⁷

The average beverage container recycling rate in the ten states with these programs in 2018 was 70%, compared with an estimated 28% recycling rate in Maryland in 2010 (see Exhibit 2). A beverage container deposit in Maryland thus has the potential to more than triple the recycling rate (depending on the amount of the deposit⁸), and have a major impact on reducing waste, litter, and their associated environmental consequences.

The Bill

The approach of HB824 is a departure from previous attempts to establish a beverage container deposit program in Maryland. Rather than spell out legislatively the operational details of a program, it instructs MDE to design and implement a program by 2021, with input from an Advisory Commission composed of diverse stakeholders.

In terms of the criteria the bill sets for the program, we strongly endorse a 10-cent deposit and the goal of a 90% redemption rate, which experience in other states has shown are mutually compatible.⁹ We propose an amendment that would provide a more complete list of the types of beverages subject to a deposit, with the addition of non-carbonated non-alcoholic drinks (bottled iced tea and coffee, sports drinks, fruit juices, flavored water), malt beverages, wine, wine coolers, distilled spirits and coolers, and liquor. Most of these programs also explicitly exclude milk. Two drafting errors need to be corrected, which we have shared with the sponsor.¹⁰

The first proposals for a Maryland beverage container deposit program were launched many years ago, and each year they have been improved to address issues raised by opponents. Yet, every year that we have waited, another 3-4 billion containers have been left in the environment. After establishing the program provided for in this bill, there will be adjustments made over time, as in other programs. What we need to do now is to take the first big step. We respectfully request a favorable report on HB824.

Martha Ainsworth, Chair
Maryland Chapter Zero Waste Committee
Martha.Ainsworth@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

⁵ In mixed materials recycling, glass is a major contaminant and often has a negative value. Removing glass contamination raises the value of other recycled materials. In contrast, glass in deposit programs is cleaner, sorted by color, with a higher value, and recycled.

⁶ “In fact, there is little evidence that any other program, in and of itself, is nearly as effective as deposit programs at reducing litter rates.” University of Maryland, Environmental Finance Center (EFC). 2011. “2011 Impact Analysis of a Beverage Container Deposit Program in Maryland.” December 15, p. 4.

⁷ In states with beverage container deposit programs, curbside and deposit coexist to maximize recycling.

⁸ States with a 10-cent deposit have the highest redemption rates.

⁹ University of Maryland EFC (2011), p. 5.

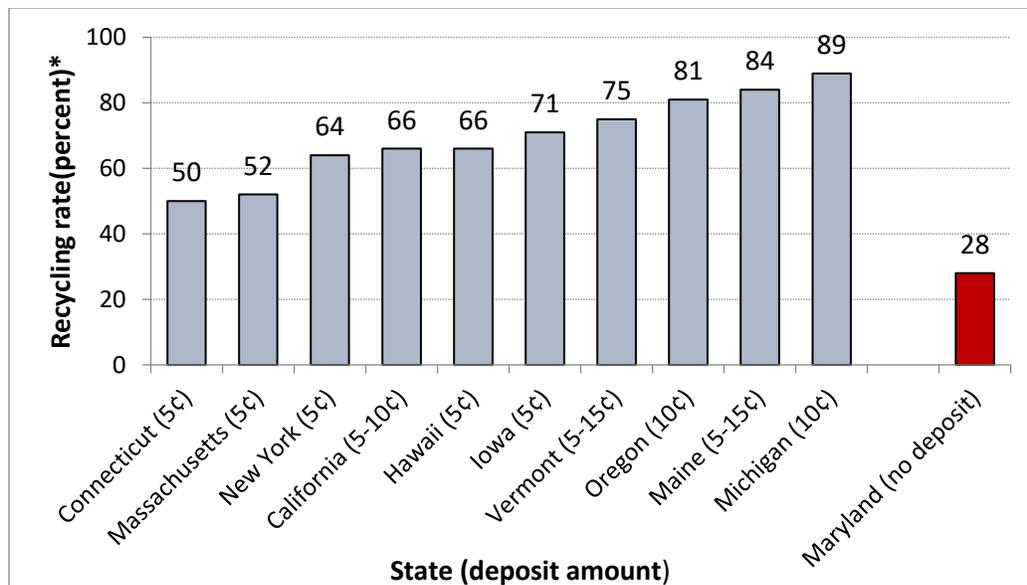
¹⁰ p. 3, line 11, delete “(iii) provide for curbside and drop-off recycling” and line 14, delete “on-the-go”.

Exhibit 1. Beverage containers are half of litter by volume collected in the Nash Run trash trap, Anacostia Watershed



Source: Anacostia Watershed Society

Exhibit 2. Recycling rates for beverage containers in bottle bill states in 2018, compared with Maryland



*2018 redemption rate for beverage containers in bottle bill states; estimated beverage container recycling rate for Maryland circa 2010.

Source: Container Recycling Institute.

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