

Testimony Regarding

Session Year 2016, S.B. Bill 312

**An Act Requiring the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to Study Bottle Bill
Beverage Container Refund Values and Redemption Fees**

March 8, 2016

My name is Gregg Pompei. I am a private citizen from Bristol, Connecticut, 40 years of age. I do not work in any industry involved with recycling or any stage of manufacturing, distributing, or retailing bottled beverages.

While I understand that this bill only provides for a study related to bottle deposits, and not any definitive action, I would be opposed to any further bill that eliminates the deposit entirely, even one that still provides for a non-refundable tax.

Recycling is important. It reduces the amount by which landfills and dumps accumulate material. It is my understanding that bottles and cans made from recycled material are cheaper than ones manufactured new, though I don't know that for a fact.

The current system of deposit provides a financial incentive for people to recycle. The simple fact that you ought to do it isn't motivation enough for many people because it takes extra effort versus tossing everything in the trash. For many people, the cash deposit makes the difference in whether they diligently recycle or not. When deposit containers have accumulated in the garage or on the porch, bringing them back can put a lot of money in a person's pocket (though you're really just getting back your own money, hence the term "deposit").

In his testimony today, one previous witness mentioned how, when the different colors of glass become mixed, the glass must all be discarded and cannot be recycled. I have some doubts about this. I believe there must be some technology that now can make use of the mixed color glass. I know in Bristol, at one time one had to separate the colors of glass for curbside recycling. Then they changed to a system where all types of recyclable material are put into a single blue recycling bucket. In fact, in Bristol you can't separate the colors of glass or even separate glass from tin cans, newspapers, plastic, or anything else. It all goes in one big blue bin.

Furthermore, while they all have only one cavity for insertion, for many glass bottle reverse vending machines, when you open them you see separate bins for the different colors of glass. The machine knows which color the bottle is by the bar code and directs the crushed bottle to the appropriate bin.

I do not want costs for a recycling program to stifle businesses. If businesses have a problem with the financial burden of costs related to labor, machine purchase, machine maintenance, and other sources, perhaps a centralized system of larger recycling centers should be put into place, run and funded by the state, more robust in terms of hours and locations than the current patchwork of such centers.

Currently, there are not many such generalized bottle redemption centers and their hours are limited. The one on Riverside Avenue in Bristol, for example, is only open until 5:00pm Monday through Friday, is open only until 3:00pm on Saturday, and is closed entirely on Sundays and holidays.

Redeeming a container sold at only some stores currently can be an undue hassle and increase the likelihood that a container will become trash instead of recycled. For example, as it stands now, if you buy a case of Big Y store brand water, one must go to a Big Y store to redeem the deposits. It can become a scavenger hunt, and it often becomes easier to simply discard them to the trash; especially after taking time and gas into account, it becomes not cost effective to redeem a remaining few leftovers. I would like to see that wherever a person goes to redeem his bottles, he is able to redeem all valid containers. As an analogy, if you buy a lottery ticket, say an Aces High scratch ticket, you can cash it at any lottery retailer, regardless of whether or not that lottery retailer sells Aces High. A site that processes bottle returns should accept all valid containers, regardless of where originally purchased and (if the site we're talking about is a retail location versus a centralized recycle center) regardless of whether the store sells that item.

Allow reverse vending machines to accept containers for which there is no deposit and simply program the machines to not increment the balance payable to the consumer when such a container is inserted. Right now, in the trash cans of bottle refund rooms I often see *e.g.* Powerade and Snapple bottles, or even water bottles originally purchased in Massachusetts (with the red stripe). People *wanted* to recycle these but they don't get recycled. Anything that streamlines the process of recycling will increase the rate of recycling. Make it as easy as possible! Perhaps, for clarity, the machine could merely display a message acknowledging receipt of the container and thanking the consumer. The final paper voucher could indicate a count of non-deposit containers received, though this separate count would have no monetary value to the consumer redeeming the voucher for cash.

Sometimes someone other than the original purchaser collects and redeems empty deposit containers. Custodians, homeless people, and good Samaritans all play a role in helping to remove bottles and cans as litter on the ground or reducing the volume of trash brought to landfills and getting them instead to recycling centers where they belong. Everyone wins. The volume of litter or landfill material is reduced. The bottles are recycled. And the person redeeming the containers gets money. I sometimes tailgate at concerts at The Meadows Music Theatre in Hartford. People are partying and just throw their empty bottles on the ground. The "bottle people" are private citizens not employed by The Meadows; with carts and trash bags, they come around and collect the bottles and cans, with the huge effect of reduced litter (but they leave non-deposits behind). Homeless people, immigrants, retirees, people in search of extra cash, and general good Samaritans often earn some money by picking up discarded containers from the street or out of the trash, helping to keep the streets clean.

The deposit should be expanded to all containers, regardless of what they contain. Currently, anyone inclined to pick up stray containers will, for example, pick up and recycle a Coke bottle while the exact same bottle right next to it (identical in terms of size and material) will remain as trash in the garbage can or litter on the ground because it contained Minute Maid lemonade. All beverage containers should have a deposit, such as those containing milk, juice, lemonade, sports drinks, ice tea, wine, or hard liquor.

Following my testimony, one legislator mentioned that Connecticut ranks very low, possibly last, in rate of recycling. He stated that some other states that do not have a deposit bill have a much higher rate of recycling. In considering copying another state's handling of the issue of bottle and can recycling, it would be critical to examine what impetus drives people in the other state to nonetheless recycle. One

must also consider the reliability and comparability of the purported figures. The figures should be well-substantiated, calculated by an independent unbiased source, and calculated in the same way. There could be cultural, community, geographic, legal, political, or other aspects that are compelling in the other state but aren't duplicated in Connecticut. After removing the deposit financial incentive, Connecticut's recycling rate could become even more abysmal!

Under a currently proposed alternative to the deposit system, there would still be a 4¢ tax to fund programs to recycling and anti-littering programs in the state. Public service announcements appealing to one's sense of civic responsibility have diminished effect; appealing to one's financial interests has a greater effect. For recycling programs to be useful, people first have to be motivated to place a bottle in some pickup receptacle where the bottle can become part of the program. People often do not do that now, even when there is a conspicuous recycle bin next to a trash can.

Tinkering with the amount of the deposit is risky. Currently, most states uniformly have 5¢ per container. Since Connecticut is a small state, raising the deposit amount could motivate people from other states, particularly near the state line, to return in Connecticut containers purchased in other states. Conversely, lowering the deposit amount could motivate people who have purchased in Connecticut to return in nearby states, burdening and agitating the other states. Some safeguard would have to be crafted to prevent this. Probably, special labels would have to be made for products sold in Connecticut, unnecessarily complicating logistics for wholesalers and retailers.

While I agree that some overhaul may be in order in the way the Connecticut bottle deposit law is carried out, I do not believe a good solution is to simply eliminate it. I would reluctantly consider exploring other recycling incentives, such as paying an incentive by weight rather than by unit. However, in that case, one must somehow make sure that liquid remaining in the container is not counted; this is relevant regardless of whether the weight is calculated on intact or crushed containers.

To summarize, my suggestions are

- Create large regional centralized recycling centers with hours comparable to those of the bottle room at your local grocery store.
- Have the state staff and fund the centers. Retailers collect the deposits and remit the funds to the statewide recycling entity, à la how retailers currently collect and remit sales tax to the Department of Revenue Services.
- Program reverse vending machines (whether at a retailer or generalized site) to accept non-deposit containers and simply not increment the amount payable to the customer for such a container.
- Extend the bottle deposit to most or all beverage containers. Retain the current monetary amount of 5¢ per unit.

Thank you, Senators and Representatives of the Connecticut General Assembly for listening to my testimony.

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