



**CONNECTICUT LEAGUE OF  
CONSERVATION VOTERS**

March 9, 2017

To: Senator Kennedy, Senator Miner, Representative Demicco and distinguished members of the Environment Committee

From: Lori Brown, Executive Director, CT League of Conservation Voters

Re: Testimony in **SUPPORT** HB 5618 Concerning an Increase in the Handling Fee for Bottle Redemption Centers

Thank you for allowing this opportunity to comment on Connecticut's landmark law for encouraging the recycling of beverage containers, and what we believe is necessary to update this already successful law to ensure it remains viable. As times have changed and the cost of doing business has risen, neither the deposit incentive nor the program fees have kept pace. Unless we **update our "Bottle Bill"** in a way that encourages consumers to increase participation and allow redeemers to earn more per container, this important law will continue to be under attack by those who want to avoid producer responsibility and those who do not make enough money to cover the cost of handling the bottle redemptions.

CT is now one of ten states with such a law, commonly known as the "Bottle Bill". The consumer pays a small deposit on a container at the time of purchase, which they fully recover if they recycle the container. The beverage distributor pays a handling fee to the retail store or redemption center for processing the returned containers. If the container is not recycled, the unredeemed deposit is instead paid to the State. **Therefore, this program earns income for retailers, redemption centers, and the State. Connecticut took in an average of \$29.2 million per year** from 2010 to 2016.

Connecticut redemption centers make it convenient for consumers to recycle. However, the owners have been struggling for many years to keep their businesses viable, and with limited ability to maintain, update or modernize their redemption equipment, many have recently closed. Since 1986, their cost of doing business has increased, yet the **handling fee (the price paid to redemption centers per container) has NOT increased in thirty years.** Because the Legislature regulates the handling fee, the law must be changed to allow for an increase.

Currently, our deposit law is limited to beer, carbonated soft drinks (including mineral waters and soda waters) and noncarbonated beverages (including plain, flavored and enhanced water.) But changes in products and consumer preferences show the need **to expand the bottle deposit** to juices, teas, sports drinks, wine, wine coolers, and liquor.

Connecticut's bottle recycling has remained at the low rate of 58% to 50% from 2013 to 2015. There is a proposal to increase the bottle deposit to 10 cents. In states with the higher deposit, consumers return a higher percentage of containers. Connecticut can look to **Iowa's bottle deposit** law, which includes wine coolers, wine and liquor bottles, and has maintained an **86%** redemption rate; or **Maine's bottle deposit law**, which includes all beverage containers except dairy products and unprocessed cider and has resulted in a **90%** rate during the same time period.

**Our current law produces high quality recyclable materials, as opposed to contaminated single stream product.** Repealing this important program would increase collection and disposal costs for municipalities. It should be updated and expanded--not eliminated--as an effective waste management tool, good for the environment and the economy.

### **What needs to be done now?**

Until the Bottle Bill program is updated to reflect current handling costs, opponents of the law will continue to call for a repeal of the Bottle Bill deposit and to replace it with a non-refundable "recycling" fee to support curbside recycling. This would effectively make litter worse as containers won't be worth anything and will discourage recycling statewide – that of individual consumers as well as non-profit groups who do high-volume recycling drives as fundraisers. Moreover, a non-refundable fee program would become a new consumer tax.

CTLCV supports HB 5618 as an effort to update this important law. Whether we increase the amount of the deposit paid, add to the number and type of beverage containers covered, increase the handling fee dispersed to retailers and redemption centers, or all the above, it is important that we further our efforts to encourage container recycling. The additional money generated from these potential improvements could be used to advance conservation efforts, help to keep redemption centers a viable business sector within our economy, and incentivize the public to recycle rather than producing more waste and litter.

Thank you for considering this testimony as you deliberate.

Lori Brown  
CTLCV  
553 Farmington Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06105  
860-236-5442  
ctlcv@ctlcv.org