



For a thriving New England

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By Email

Chair Senator Christine Cohen
Chair Representative Mike Demicco
Environment Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: *HB 5340, An Act Concerning the Modernization of the Connecticut Bottle Redemption Program*

Dear Chairs Cohen and Demicco:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 5340, an Act Concerning the Modernization of the Connecticut Bottle Redemption Program. Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) is a member-supported nonprofit organization working to conserve natural resources, protect public health, and build healthy communities throughout New England. Through its Zero Waste Project, CLF aims to improve waste diversion and recycling programs and protect communities and our environment from the dangers of unsustainable plastic use.

CLF supports House Bill 5340. Bottle redemption programs increase recycling rates, reduce litter, create jobs, and provide a pathway to refillable containers. HB 5340 would provide a necessary update to Connecticut's ailing bottle redemption program, and it would divert beverage containers from Connecticut's incinerators and expensive single-stream recycling programs.

I. The Bottle Redemption Program Works.

Bottle redemption programs are the single most effective way to collect materials for recycling. Deposits encourage individuals to redeem containers so that those containers can be recycled. The two U.S. states with ten-cent deposits on beverage containers—Michigan and Oregon—have

redemption rates at or above 90 percent.¹ By contrast, states without deposit return systems collect, on average, about 27 percent of their beverage containers for recycling.²

Higher collection rates result in fewer beverage containers in the environment. After Hawaii, implemented a bottle bill in 2005, the number of beverage containers collected during Hawaii’s International Coastal Cleanup fell from 23,471 in 2004 to 10,905 in 2007—a 53.5 percent drop over just three years.³ States that implemented bottle bills in the 1970s and 1980s documented reductions in beverage container litter between 69 and 84 percent.⁴

Moreover, bottle redemption programs lead to higher recycling rates for collected containers. According to the National Association for PET Container Resources (NAPCOR), 88% of PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic bottles collected via bottle redemption programs are converted into “clean flake”—shredded plastic pieces used as a raw material to create new plastic products.⁵ Only 68% of PET plastic bottles collected curbside are converted into “clean flake”.⁶ Moreover, 98% of glass bottles redeemed in deposit return systems are recycled into a new bottle or fiberglass, compared to 60% of glass bottles collected curbside.⁷

Bottle redemption programs also create between 11 and 38 times more jobs than curbside recycling.⁸ A recent study by Eunomia Research and Consulting, Inc. (Eunomia) concluded that New York’s bottle return program—which, like Connecticut, places a five-cent deposit on soda,

¹ See Genevieve Grippo, *An Effort to Dramatically Expand Michigan’s Bottle Deposit Law is Back*, Newschannel 3, Dec. 29, 2019, <https://wwmt.com/news/local/an-effort-to-dramatically-expand-michigans-bottle-deposit-law-is-back>; Cassandra Profita, *Oregon Bottle Deposit System Hits 90 Percent Redemption Rate*, NPR, Feb. 4, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2019/02/04/688656261/oregon-bottle-deposit-system-hits-90-percent-redemption-rate>.

² See Jenny Gitlitz, Container Recycling Institute, *Bottled Up: Beverage Container Recycling Stagnates (2000-2010)*, app. A (2013).

³ Haw. Dep’t of Health, *Report to the Twenty-Fifth Legislature*, 9 (2009).

⁴ Container Recycling Institute, *Litter Studies in Bottle Bill States*, <http://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/benefits-of-bottle-bills/litter-studies-in-bottle-bill-states>.

⁵ NAPCOR, *Report on Postconsumer PET Container Recycling Activity*, 14 (2018), https://napcor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAPCOR_2017RateReport_FINAL.pdf.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ See Gitlitz, *supra* note 2, at 24.

⁸ Jeffrey Morris and Clarissa Morawski, Container Recycling Institute, *Returning to Work: Understanding the Domestic Jobs Impacts from Different Methods of Recycling Beverage Containers*, 11 (2011), <http://www.container-recycling.org/assets/pdfs/reports/2011-ReturningToWork.pdf>.

water, and beer—creates the equivalent of 5,700 jobs statewide.⁹ Eunomia further concluded that were New York to expand the scope of its program to include all beverage containers, and increase the deposit amount to ten cents, it could create more than 2,000 additional jobs.¹⁰

Perhaps most importantly, bottle redemption programs can pave the way for refillable beverage systems. In 2018, Oregon used its existing deposit return infrastructure to launch a statewide refillable bottle system¹¹ that utilizes approximately 245,000 refillable beer bottles.¹² Reusable containers avoid the crushing environmental and health harms associated with the production and disposal of single-use plastic containers, and the energy requirements associated with producing and recycling billions of plastic, glass, and aluminum containers.

II. Connecticut’s Bottle Bill Needs an Update.

In 2018, Connecticut redeemed only 50% of its deposit containers.¹³ This is the lowest rate of all states with bottle redemption programs. The lagging redemption rate owes primarily to Connecticut’s antiquated five-cent deposit, which has gone unchanged since the implementation of the bottle bill in 1980. Had the deposit value kept pace with inflation, it would stand at 17 cents today.¹⁴

Moreover, Connecticut has failed to update its bottle bill to include the wide variety of beverage containers that have become commonplace since 1980. In the past several decades we have been inundated with single-use bottles and cans filled with juices, iced teas, energy drinks, and sports drinks, none of which are included in Connecticut’s deposit return system.

As a result, every year Connecticut throws away more than 20,000 tons of PET plastic bottles, more than 5,000 tons of aluminum beverage containers, and more than 36,000 tons of glass

⁹ Sarah Edwards, Eunomia Research and Consulting, Inc., *Employment and Economic Impact of Container Deposits*, table E1 (2019).

¹⁰ *Id.* at table E2.

¹¹ Jared Pablen, Resource Recycling, *Oregon Group to Launch Refillable Bottle Program*, Feb. 7, 2017, <https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2017/02/07/oregon-group-launch-refillable-bottle-program/>.

¹² Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative, *2018 Annual Report*, 2, <https://www.obrc.com/Content/Reports/OBRC%20Annual%20Report%202018.PDF>.

¹³ See Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), *CT Bottle Bill Redemption Data*, https://www.ct.gov/deep/Lib/deep/reduce_reuse_recycle/bottles/bottle_bill_data_-_thru_Q1_2019.pdf (last accessed Feb. 27, 2020).

¹⁴ See Bureau of Labor and Statistics, *CPI Inflation Calculator*, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=0.05&year1=198001&year2=202001>.

containers.¹⁵ The vast majority of these containers are incinerated in Connecticut’s resource recovery facilities. Burning 20,000-plus tons of plastic bottles releases persistent organic pollutants (POPs), dioxins, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), lead, arsenic, and mercury—all of which are toxic.¹⁶ Plastic incineration also results in large-scale greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁷

These containers also end up in Connecticut’s waterways in alarming numbers. Volunteers participating in Connecticut River Conservancy’s 2019 Source to Sea Cleanup collected 7,994 plastic bottles, 7,000 aluminum cans, and 4,778 glass bottles over a two-day cleanup event.¹⁸

PET plastic, aluminum, and glass beverage containers also make up more than 12 percent of single-stream recycling in Connecticut.¹⁹ As detailed above, single-stream recycling programs are less effective than bottle redemption programs at recycling these containers. Moreover, curbside recycling is straining the budgets of communities throughout Connecticut. According to survey data from the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, towns and cities like South Windsor (\$73.00 per ton), Waterbury (\$75.00 per ton), Bridgeport (\$78.67 per ton), Fairfield (\$78.67 per ton), Litchfield (\$83.00 per ton), Westport (\$83.08 per ton), New Britain (\$85.00 per ton), and Warren (\$85.00 per ton) are paying exorbitantly for their single-stream recycling programs. Based on recycling data from DEEP, Fairfield is paying more than \$400,000 per year for recycling, and Waterbury and Bridgeport are paying more than \$500,000 per year.

By upgrading and expanding its bottle bill, Connecticut can start to address some of these problems by diverting material from polluting incinerators, the environment, and expensive single-stream recycling programs and into a program that works.

III. HB 5340 Is a Necessary Boost to Connecticut’s Bottle Bill.

House Bill 5340 provides several necessary updates to Connecticut’s bottle redemption program. This bill would expand the scope of the bottle bill to include juices, iced teas, sports drinks, and

¹⁵ DEEP, *2015 Statewide Waste Characterization Study*, 3-5 (2016), https://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/waste_management_and_disposal/Solid_Waste_Management_Plan/CMMS_Final_2015_MSW_Characterization_Study.pdf.

¹⁶ See David Azouly, *Plastic & Health: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet*, 44–47 (2019), <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Plastic-and-Health-The-Hidden-Costs-of-a-Plastic-Planet-February-2019.pdf>.

¹⁷ See U.S. EPA, *Solid Waste Management and Greenhouse Gases, a Life-Cycle Assessment of Emissions and Sinks*, 76 (3d ed. 2006)

¹⁸ Connecticut River Conservancy, *Cleanup Chronicle: 23rd Annual Source to Sea Cleanup*, 5 (2019), <https://www.ctriver.org/wp-content/uploads/CRC-Cleanup-Chonicle-2019-FINAL-web.pdf>.

¹⁹ See DEEP, *supra* note 15, at 4-7.

energy drinks, pulling thousands of tons of additional containers (especially plastic containers) into the redemption system.

This bill would also increase the container deposit value from five cents to ten cents. Doubling the deposit value will have a significant impact on redemption rates. By way of example, Oregon increased its deposit value from five cents to ten cents in 2017 and its redemption rate skyrocketed from 64 percent in 2016 to 90 percent in 2018.²⁰

Between the expanded container coverage and higher redemption rates that come with a ten-cent deposit, this bill could help divert more than 27,000 tons of containers from Connecticut's waste incinerators and 34,000 tons of containers from expensive single-stream recycling programs.²¹ It would also help keep beverage containers out of Connecticut's parks and waterways.

House Bill 5340 also includes a much-needed increase in the handling fees paid by beverage distributors to retailers and redemption centers. These handling fees fund the deposit return system and make it possible for retailers and redemption centers to do the important work of collecting and sorting recyclable containers. Increasing the handling fees to three-and-a-half cents per container will help Connecticut keep pace with other northeast states like New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont, and it will help alleviate the financial burdens under which redemption centers have been operating.

IV. CLF Has Several Recommendations for Improving HB 5340.

CLF respectfully suggests two amendments to House Bill 5340. First, CLF recommends amending Section 1(2) of the bill to include wine and liquor in the definition of noncarbonated beverages. According to the Container Recycling Institute, wine and liquor bottles, by weight, constitute 45 percent of the glass beverage containers sold in Connecticut.²² Expanding the bottle redemption program to include wine and liquor bottles could divert a significant number of additional glass containers from Connecticut's waste stream and its expensive single-stream

²⁰ See Profita, *supra* note 1.

²¹ Calculations based on DEEP's 2015 Statewide Waste Characterization Study, *see, supra* note 15 at 3-5 & 4-7, and DEEP recycling data, *see* DEEP, *Summary Report—Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Recycling & Disposal Data for Connecticut Cities & Towns—FY2014*, https://www.ct.gov/deep/Lib/deep/reduce_reuse_recycle/Data/Summary_of_MSW-recycling_and_disposal_for_ct_munis_fy2014.pdf, assuming an 85% redemption rate with a ten-cent deposit.

²² Container Recycling Institute, *2017 Beverage Market Analysis* (2020).



recycling systems. Maine's bottle redemption program places a fifteen-cent deposit on wine and liquor containers, and it has an 87.2 percent redemption rate for liquor bottles.²³

Second, CLF recommends that HB 5340's effective dates be amended as follows: Section 1 (expanding the scope of beverage containers in the bottle redemption program) effective July 1, 2021; Section 2 (increasing the deposit from five cents to ten cents) effective January 1, 2021; Section 3 (increasing the handling fee to three and a half cents per container) effective July 1, 2020. Increasing the handling fee on July 1, 2020 will give redemption centers and retailers much needed financial relief. Rolling out the deposit increase and container expansion in respective six-month increments will allow redemption centers to recover so that they will be able to manage the increased container volumes. Implementing all updates to the bottle redemption programs no later than July 1, 2021 ensures that improvements to Connecticut's recycling systems are not unnecessarily delayed.

V. Conclusion

For the above stated reasons, **CLF supports House Bill 5340 and urges its passage.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Budris", written in a cursive style.

Kevin Budris
Staff Attorney, CLF Zero Waste Project

²³ Office of Program Evaluation & Government Accountability of the Maine State Legislature, *Maine's Beverage Container Redemption Program*, 38 (2018), <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/2316>.