



**Written Testimony Submitted to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on
2024 Executive Budget Proposal: Better Bottle Bill**

February 7, 2024

The Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative is a coalition of community leaders and activists committed to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the development of a clean energy economy in our region and state. Our flagship program, the Ithaca 2030 District, seeks to enhance the energy and water performance of commercial buildings in downtown Ithaca and reduce their carbon footprint. We welcome this opportunity to express our whole-hearted support for the Better Bottle Bill. We think this bill provides an important solution to the recycling crisis and will help New York achieve the ambitious goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

History of the NYS Bottle Bill

The New York State Returnable Container Act, commonly known as the “Bottle Bill,” requires a five cent refundable deposit to be placed on eligible beverage containers. First enacted in 1982, the program originally covered beer and soda sold in New York and soon after was expanded to include wine coolers. The law requires retailers who sell covered beverages to accept returns of empty containers for the products they sell and refund the deposits. The law also requires beverage distributors to compensate retailers for the cost of collecting and recycling empty containers by paying them a small handling fee per container. In 2009 the law was expanded to include bottled water, and the handling fee was increased from 2 cents to 3.5 cents.

Expanding and Updating the Bottle Bill

Three important steps are needed to increase the effectiveness of the Bottle Bill:

- 1) **Expand the Bottle Bill to include wine, spirits, hard cider, and most non-carbonated beverages.** A deposit system can dramatically reduce litter and solid waste that would otherwise be thrown out. Many other states have already included these containers in their laws. For example, Maine’s law covers all beverages except dairy products and unprocessed cider. New York needs to expand its coverage, too.
- 2) **Increase the deposit from five cents to ten cents and use revenues to support recycling equity.** States with higher deposit fees have higher redemption rates than states with a five cent fee. In Michigan, where the deposit fee is ten cents, the redemption rate in 2019 was 89%. Vermont has a fifteen cent fee on liquor bottles and the redemption rate for liquor containers in 2020 was 83%. Increasing the deposit would also generate more revenues for the state, and those additional revenues could be used to increase redemption options in low-income communities and address other litter and solid waste problems in such communities. Clearly, it’s past time for New York to raise its deposit to ten cents.

- 3) **Increase the handling fee.** Redemption centers play an important role in helping to redeem containers covered by the Bottle Bill. The handling fee has not been increased since 2009. As costs have risen, the expenses connected to handling returnables have as well. It's time to increase the handling fee to at least five cents.
- 4) **Ensure redemption compliance and increase accessibility.** Currently, enforcement of the law is spotty. Additional revenues could be used to boost enforcement and expand redemption centers to make it easier for consumers to redeem their deposits.

An Effective Solution to Littering and Recycling

New York's Bottle Bill has had a dramatic impact in the last forty years on the reduction of litter and increase in recycling rates. New York's redemption rate in 2020 was 64%, and 5.5 billion containers were recycled in the state. Overall, the Bottle Bill reduces roadside container litter in New York by 70%.

States with bottle deposit laws have better recycling rates than non-deposit states. According to the Container Recycling Institute, states with bottle deposit laws have a beverage container recycling rate of around 60%, while the rate in non-deposit states is only 24%.

The expansion of the state's Bottle Bill would improve recycling rates and make New York's environment and communities cleaner; it would also help municipal recycling programs that are now facing a recycling crisis. In particular, municipal recycling programs are grappling with how to handle glass containers in their recycling streams. When glass breaks in curbside containers it can render much of the other materials unrecyclable. The expansion of the Bottle Bill to include wine, spirits, and hard cider would take a significant amount of the glass containers out of the waste stream and ease the stress on municipal recycling programs.

The costs of recycling containers not covered under the state's current Bottle Bill have become high for many municipalities. The costs associated with collecting and processing PET plastic bottles and glass, for example, are higher than any revenues they generate. Expanding the Bottle Bill would reduce or eliminate these costs for municipal programs by increasing the deposit and creating a financial incentive for consumers to return the containers. It would also require retailers to accept these containers, relieving the burden on local government recycling programs. Furthermore, an expansion of the Bottle Bill would result in increased economic opportunities for New Yorkers, creating an estimated 4,145 new jobs.

Conclusion

As Governor Hochul has emphasized, it is essential that New York include recycling issues in its climate change efforts. The waste industry accounts for an estimated 12% of the state's greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing the amount of plastic waste, and waste in general, is a critical way to protect the environment and help prevent runaway climate change.

In conclusion, the TCCPI coalition views the Better Bottle Bill as a crucial component of the effort to implement the CLCPA and urges the State Legislature to adopt it. The expansion of the state's Bottle Bill

will significantly increase recycling rates and make New York's environment and communities cleaner, and it will also help municipal recycling programs that are currently facing a recycling crisis. Thank you.

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