

RI Needs a Bottle Bill

H5502 will reduce litter, prevent plastic pollution and improve recycling



The Problem

Beverage containers are littering our neighborhoods, clogging storm drains, polluting our waterways and piling up in the landfill, which is estimated to reach capacity by 2040 if we don't change course. Unfortunately, curbside recycling is not effectively capturing beverage containers, and many of those that do make it onto a recycling truck actually end up in the landfill or are "downcycled."

Despite decades of anti-littering efforts and an increase in access to single-stream recycling in the state, **litter and marine debris continue to be a persistent and growing environmental problem**, both along the shore and in our inland communities. Over 33,000 beverage containers — and beverage container pieces — were removed from RI's shore during the 2022 International Coastal Cleanup event. And local watershed volunteers across the state collected over 40,000 miniature alcohol containers — or "nips" — in the past year alone. Beverage containers routinely clog our stormwater collection systems, and microplastics can now be found in nearly every waterbody in the state.

At the same time, **our recycling system is failing** to meet the state's recycling targets, and tons of recyclable beverage containers are buried in the landfill each year. Much of the material we think is being recycled isn't. For example, all of the glass currently captured by our recycling system in RI is actually buried at the landfill, and most of the plastic isn't turned into new bottles but is "downcycled" into lesser materials.

In short: **What we're doing isn't working. We need to do better.**

The Solution: Recycling Refunds

Luckily, ten states, including our neighbors in Massachusetts and Connecticut, are currently modeling a solution: a recycling refund system, or "bottle bill." Decades of experience from these states — and countries around the world — show that these programs both reduce litter and improve recycling:

- A study by the Container Recycling Institute of the effects of "bottle bills" when first adopted in the U.S. showed a consistent **70-84% reduction in beverage container litter** and a 34-47% reduction in total litter.¹
- Recycling rates for glass, aluminum, and PET plastic in states with recycling refund systems are **more than double** the rates in states without one.²



¹ "Bottle Bill Resource Guide: Litter Studies in Bottle Bill States." Container Recycling Institute. www.bottlebill.org/index.php/benefits-of-bottle-bills/litter-studies-in-bottle-bill-states

² 50 States of Recycling. Ball. March 2021. <https://www.ball.com/getattachment/37f5f87f-d462-44c5-913f-d3075754741a/50-States-of-Recycling-Eunomia-Report-Final-Published-March-30-2021-UPDATED-v2.pdf>

About the Bottle Bill – H5502

House bill H5502 is informed by decades of experience with recycling refund systems around the country and world.

In states with a bottle bill, customers pay a small deposit on each beverage container they purchase which is returned to them when they bring the empty bottle back to a participating retailer or redemption center to be recycled. These recycling refund systems are a form of **producer responsibility**, as the costs of handling the empty containers are paid by the beverage companies or distributors in the form of a handling fee. The RI legislation incorporates several key features:

- A 10-cent refundable deposit
- Inclusion of all types of beverage containers (even “nips”), making it easier for consumers and maximizing the material captured
- Convenient return options for consumers including “return to retail” and independent redemption centers
- Reinvestment of any unclaimed deposits back into the container redemption and recycling system
- Strong government oversight with clear standards and performance targets

The RI bottle bill will increase recycling rates, reduce litter, fight plastic pollution in our waterways, and incentivize the beverage industry to implement a more sustainable model with bottles and containers that are easier to recycle or even reuse. Deposit return systems complement existing curbside recycling programs and have been shown to benefit local economies by reducing waste management costs for cities and towns, and creating jobs in retail, distribution and recycling.

Rhode Island has an opportunity to pass the best “bottle bill” in the country and create a high-performing recycling refund system that reduces litter, prevents pollution and improves our recycling system. As the Ocean State, we should be leading the way in the fight against litter and plastic pollution.

Coalition

H5502 is supported by a growing coalition of organizations who care about reducing litter, keeping our Bay and waterways clean and improving recycling in the state, including:

