

**Testimony before the
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
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March 29, 2023**

RE: Testimony in Support of LD 134 – An Act to Increase the Handling Fee for Beverage Containers Reimbursed to Dealers and Redemption Centers

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Nora Bosworth, and I am a Staff Attorney for the Conservation Law Foundation’s (“CLF”) Zero Waste Project. CLF’s Zero Waste Project works to identify and address polluting and unsustainable waste management practices while promoting proven and effective solutions such as source reduction, reuse, recycling and composting. These goals are the same solutions outlined in Maine’s solid waste hierarchy.¹

CLF supports LD 134, An Act to Increase the Handling Fee for Beverage Containers Reimbursed to Dealers and Redemption Centers. This emergency bill would increase the redemption center handling fee to \$.0575 per container and provides for a biannual increase based on the Consumer Price Index established by the federal Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. This bill recognizes the urgency of stabilizing Maine’s most successful recycling program through helping redemption centers bear the costs of inflation.

Bottle Bills are highly effective at increasing recycling rates, improving the quality and lifecycle of recycled materials, and lessening both litter and our reliance on polluting landfills and incinerators.

Bolstering and preserving our container redemption system is integral to helping our state reach its statutory goals for waste diversion. Maine’s objective, laid out in 38 M.R.S.A 2132, is to recycle or compost half the municipal solid waste generated in Maine by 2021, and to reduce our municipal solid waste disposal rate by 5% per capita every 5 years.² Maine has not yet met these goals.³ If we are committed to these objectives we must also commit to reviving and sustaining our most successful recycling program.

¹ [38 M.R.S.A. 2101](#)

² [38 M.R.S.A. 2132](#)

³ Maine Department of Environmental Protection, 2020&2021 Municipal Solid Waste Generation & Disposal, 9-10, Jan. 2023, available at [2023-DEP-WGDC-Report-CY-2020-21 \(3\).pdf](#)

Bottle Bills incentivize recycling and the data shows this incentivization works. People who purchase beverage containers covered by a Bottle Bill have a financial incentive to return them to redemption centers for recycling. In Maine, the Bottle Bill is exclusively responsible for every glass container that is recycled, and for the majority of plastic containers that are recycled, statewide.⁴ According to the Container Recycling Institute, states with container deposit laws recycled aluminum, PET, and glass at a rate of 77%, 57%, and 66% respectively.⁵ Conversely, states without container deposit laws recycled these materials at much lower rates, 36% for aluminum, 17% for PET, and 22% for glass.⁶ This means that states with container deposit laws recycle these materials at almost twice the rate of recycling as states that do not. Consequently, container redemption systems decrease the demand for manufacturing virgin plastic and glass, which in turns reduces the greenhouse gas emissions caused by such manufacturing.⁷

Maine's container redemption system has also protected our beautiful state from huge amounts of litter over the last 45 years. States that have Bottle Bills on average see beverage container litter drop by 70 to 84%.⁸ A reduction in litter means less contamination of our waters, and fewer plastic bottles breaking down in the natural environment, releasing greenhouse gas emissions.⁹ Container redemption systems are straightforward environmental solutions that consistently produce results.

Maine's Bottle Bill also results in sorting cleaner materials, which can be recycled more effectively, more safely and for a higher value. With single-stream recycling, people regularly put unrecyclable materials in with the recyclable ones. Consequently, "the entire stream becomes contaminated, and the effort required to re-separate those materials far outweighs the economic value of the resulting recycling stream so that recycling companies understandably choose not to

⁴ Maine DEP, 2020&2021 Municipal Solid Waste Generation & Disposal, 15, Jan. 2023, available at [2023-DEP-WGDC-Report-CY-2020-21 \(3\).pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dep/waste-management-and-reduction/municipal-solid-waste-generation-and-disposal/2020-21-municipal-solid-waste-generation-and-disposal-report-cy-2020-21-3.pdf)

⁵ 2019 Beverage Market Data Analysis, Container Recycling Institute. Available at https://www.container-recycling.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=730&Itemid=1372

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Valerie Volcovici, Reuters, Plastics to Outpace Coal's Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2030, Report, Oct. 21, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/plastics-outpace-coals-greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-2030-report-2021-10-21/>; EPA, U.S. Flat Glass Industry Carbon Intensities, 2019, available at <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2022-06/2019%20Flat%20Glass%20Plant%20Carbon%20Intensities%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

⁸ Litter Studies in Bottle Bill States, Bottle Bill Resource Guide, available at <https://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/benefits-of-bottle-bills/litter-studies-in-bottle-bill-states>

⁹ New Study Shows Plastics Release Greenhouse Gases, Contributing to Climate Change, Surfrider Foundation, available at <https://www.surfrider.org/coastal-blog/entry/new-study-shows-plastic-as-source-of-greenhouse-gases-potentially-contribut>; Monica Isola, Common Plastics Emit Global Warming Pollution, Yale Climate Connections, Nov. 7, 2018, available at <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2018/11/common-plastics-emit-global-warming-pollution/>

do it.”¹⁰ Notably, 25% of what consumers put into single-stream recycling bins is too contaminated to be recycled at all, and ultimately ends up in landfills.¹¹ Bottle Bills solve this issue. They offer the route of least contamination for recycling aluminum, glass and plastic beverage containers; in turn these containers can be truly recycled, and not wind up in a landfill or incinerator.

Why Maine Must Increase the Handling Fee:

The benefits of our Bottle Bill are evident, but the system is starting to falter. Our state’s container redemption rates have traditionally outperformed those in other states with similar systems, yet these numbers are falling. In 2013, Mainers redeemed 90% of the redeemable containers, in 2017 this rate went down to 84% which was still one of the highest in the nation, and more recently in 2020 this rate had dropped to 76%.¹²

One of the reasons these rates are dropping is that the redemption centers charged with receiving, sorting, and returning the containers to the beverage manufacturers, are suffering financial hardship.¹³ The Department of Environmental Protection reported that the number of active redemption center licenses had fallen from 374 at the end of 2019, to 328 in July, 2022.¹⁴ Redemption centers have become increasingly strained by the costs of inflation, with no way to raise their income—the statutorily set handling fee of 4.5 cents per container, that beverage manufacturers pay such centers for providing these services.

Meanwhile, the expenses of running the redemption centers have soared. Labor costs, payroll tax, and workers compensation and insurance have all risen, and these labor items account for nearly 50% of redemption center’s total expenses.¹⁵ Other rising costs for redemption centers include state redemption license fees, heating oil, rent and property taxes, among others.¹⁶ Our redemption centers are key to the success of our container redemption program, and they need our help. In addition to immediately raising the handling fee to \$.0575 cents, this bill wisely grants the Department authority to adjust the handling fee after Jan. 1, 2025, and every two years

¹⁰ John Langhus, [Testimony in Support of H. 158](#), Putney Road Redemption Center, 3, Feb. 8, 2023

¹¹ Maggie Koerth, The Era of Easy Recycling May be Coming to an End, [FiveThirtyEight](#) (Jan. 10, 2019).

¹² Redemption Rates and Other Features of 10 U.S. State Deposit Programs, Container Recycling Institute, available at [10 States](#) https://www.container-recycling.org/images/Allstates/10_States_Summary_and_Notes_July_2022.pdf_and_Notes_July_2022.pdf ([container-recycling.org](#))

¹³ Ross Ketschke, Dozens of Maine Bottle Redemption Centers Close amid Pandemic, Inflation, [WMTW News](#), available at <https://www.wmtw.com/article/dozens-of-maine-bottle-redemption-centers-close-amid-pandemic-inflation/40862788>

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Peter Welch, Owner of Forest Avenue Redemption Center, presenting at the Natural Resources Council of Maine’s webinar, “Modernizing Maine’s Bottle Bill”, posted on Mar. 24, 2023, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXCMujYV3CQ>

¹⁶ *Id.*



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thereafter, based on the Consumer Price Index; such a provision ensures that we do not need to go through this legislative process every time the economy fluctuates, and redemption centers struggle to stay open.

LD 134 is a logical measure to meet the needs of redemption centers in today's economy. The Department of Environmental Protection stated in its last Municipal Solid Waste report that the container redemption system "is a crucial piece of the recycling infrastructure throughout the state".¹⁷ We should address the growing demands of inflation and help ensure the sustainability of this integral program. CLF wants to see Maine's recycling system thrive, and thus we support LD 134. I urge this Committee to vote LD 134 favorably and act with urgency.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹⁷ Maine DEP, 2020&2021 Municipal Solid Waste Generation & Disposal, 16, Jan. 2023, available at [2023-DEP-WGDC-Report-CY-2020-21 \(3\).pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dep/waste-management-and-reduction/waste-generation-and-disposal/2020-21-municipal-solid-waste-generation-and-disposal-report)