



MAINE BEVERAGE ASSOCIATION

Testimony of Newell Augur
Director

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources

In Opposition to LD 1418, An Act Concerning Single-use Disposable Water Bottles and Water Refill Stations

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Good afternoon, Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources, my name is Newell Augur. I am a resident of Yarmouth and a lawyer with Pierce Atwood. I represent the members of the Maine Beverage Association, your local distributors of a variety of refreshing products including diet soda, soda, juices, sports drinks and, increasingly, water. I am here to testify in opposition to LD 1418, An Act Concerning Single-use Disposable Water Bottles and Water Refill Stations.

Increasingly, more Americans are choosing bottled water as a no-calorie, convenient and refreshing on-the-go beverage option. That is a good thing. Water, like many other food and beverage products, is packaged in PET (or number 1) plastic. Unlike many other forms of plastic which are not recyclable, PET is recyclable. In fact, PET is the most recycled plastic worldwide. Plastic water bottles and the caps sold by our companies are 100% recyclable. Our industry is one of the few that has specifically designed nearly all of our packaging to that standard.

Beverage containers are among the most recycled consumer product packaging in the nation. Our companies are working to ensure that even more of these containers end up where they are supposed to – in recycling programs and not in the trash or as litter. We have committed to increase the amount of recycled PET content used in our bottles and as an industry are invested in getting “Every Bottle Back” to make good on that commitment. We have invested in research – going on right here in Maine – on developing a bio-based material for water bottles that comes from harvested timber. We have saved hundreds of millions of pounds of raw materials through light-weighting and packaging reductions. Collectively, these changes are significantly reducing the environmental footprint of our packaging.

It is important to keep in mind the actual scale of the plastic bottled water footprint. Those bottles account for less than one-third of 1 percent of all waste produced in the United States (Paper makes up more than 40 percent of landfill content, according to the EPA.) Further, the petroleum used to make plastic water bottles – often cited by our critics – accounts for 4/100ths of 1 percent of America's total oil consumption. These facts may explain why there is no other state in the country that has imposed a statewide ban on the sale of bottled water.

None of this is to say that beverage companies are satisfied with the current response to the problem of plastic pollution. Our beverage companies are partnering with The Recycling Partnership and the Closed Loop Foundation, organizations that are focused on reviving consumers' interest in recycling by educating them on what, how and why to recycle, and making direct investments in recycling and collection infrastructure to support a circular economy. Through these organization and as an industry, we are supporting progressive policies that advance these goals.

The members of our association – Blue Triton/Poland Spring, Coke Northeast, Keurig Dr Pepper, Pepsi Beverages Maine and Polar Beverages – had a bottle bill redemption rate of 81% in 2022 (that does not count the bottles that we recycled through municipal recycling programs). We agree that there is more to do to make sure our plastic bottles do not wind up as litter in waterways or dumped in landfills. Our bottles are made to be remade. They can be used again and again for new bottles or for other products so we can reduce the amount of new plastic used today. We want every bottle back, and we're investing significant resources in innovations and recycling systems that keep plastic out of our oceans, rivers and shorelines.

We do not oppose the installation of water refill stations and, in fact, have installed them on any number of college campuses where we have an account relationship. However, we do not believe that requiring every Maine retailer that sells bottled water to install a water refill station in the store and prohibiting the sale of bottled water in State buildings where food service is provided, as envisioned by this bill, is the right answer. The better course is continuing to create and develop the types of public-private partnerships that have been forged, and that are advancing packaging sustainability.

An Act to Promote a Circular Economy through Increased Post-consumer Recycled Plastic Content in Beverage Containers, which became law last session, is an excellent example of this. The legislation built upon existing commitments that the parent companies of the local distributors in our association have made to increase the percentage of rPET in their bottles and packaging. The Coca Cola Company has set a target of 50% recycled content in beverage bottles and cans by 2030. Keurig Dr Pepper aims to have 30% recycled content across its packaging portfolio by 2025. Pepsi Beverages Company has set a target of 25% recycled content in plastic packaging in the US by 2025 as well, and to reduce virgin plastic content of its beverage portfolio by 35%. Blue Triton has a target of using 35% recycled material in all its beverage bottles, including Poland Spring, by 2025.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have.