



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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**Testimony in Support of LD 1909
“An Act to Modernize Maine’s Beverage Container Redemption Law”
and In Opposition to LD 1910**

“An Act to Amend the Returnable Beverage Container Program”

Sarah Nichols, NRCM Sustainable Maine Director

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Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Sarah Nichols, and I am the Sustainable Maine Director for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I appreciate this opportunity to testify in strong support of LD 1909, An Act to Modernize Maine’s Beverage Container Redemption Law. We also are testifying in opposition to LD 1910.

Over the past 45 years, Maine’s Bottle Bill program has been extremely effective at reducing litter, increasing recycling, creating jobs, funding charities, and reducing costs for municipalities and taxpayers. The Bottle Bill is a critical foundation for Maine’s recycling culture and remains as important and relevant as ever. Maine people are proud of the Bottle Bill, and we should be

When the beverage industry attempted to roll back the Bottle Bill in a referendum in 1976, Maine voters rejected that effort by a margin of 6 to 1. Additional efforts to weaken the law have been rejected over the years. This Committee has consistently defended the Bottle Bill, voted to expand it with additional items, such as nips, and most recently you helped stabilize funding for redemption centers by passing LD 134. We thank you for that work, and now we ask you to help pass LD 1909, which will streamline and strengthen the program so that it remains successful for the future.

LD 1909 will address three key aspects of Maine’s Bottle Bill that require attention:

- 1) **Strengthens Redemption Center Finances:** A static, statutorily set handling fee does not protect redemption centers against future increases in rent, utilities, and labor costs, which threatens the sustainability of their businesses. LD 134 has helped bring them up to where they need to be today, but further long-term solutions are proposed in LD 1909,
- 2) **Simplifies the system:** The sorting, collection, and billing processes have become overly burdensome and complicated, in large part because of the number of new beverage companies and types of beverages brought to market since 1976. LD 1909 would bring significant new efficiencies to the program, and
- 3) **Supports the use of technology:** The bill provides financial incentives for redemption centers to use reverse vending machines and acknowledges the existence of CLYNK’s bulk processing technology. Both technologies provide economic and environmental benefits.

In contrast, LD 1910 primarily addresses the issue of simplified sorting, but it does it in a way that's designed to maximize benefits for large beverage manufacturers. LD 1910 would threaten the viability of Maine's redemption centers and provide little incentive for the use of technology. Both bills propose the establishment of a new commingling cooperative that would help administer the program with the Department of Environmental Protection. Attached to my testimony is a side-by-side comparison of the two bills.

NRCM strongly recommends the approach presented in LD 1909 for the following reasons:

- **Better approach to the handling fee:** LD 1909 improves the finances of redemption centers by adjusting the handling fee for inflation, and it protects the beverage industry from the financial burden of any future increases by allowing them to utilize the unclaimed deposits to offset any future increases in the handling fee. LD 1910 would undo the good work of LD 134 and reduce the handling fee back to where it was, which would threaten the viability of Maine's redemption centers, again.
- **More equitable use of unclaimed deposits:** LD 1909 requires the unclaimed consumer funds to be reinvested back into the program in a way that helps everyone involved to offset their costs. LD 1910 simply perpetuates the current system of providing these funds as tax-free income for beverage manufacturers.
- **Ensures investments in recycling and reuse systems:** LD 1909 requires the new cooperative to use a portion of the unclaimed deposits to invest in activities that reduce waste and lead to more refill and reuse of containers and to support the use of technology that provides economic and environmental benefits for the program. LD 1910 squanders this opportunity because it fails to include this requirement.
- **Providing equal standing for all players:** LD 1909 ensures that CLYNK's bulk processing technology is recognized, that small beverage manufacturers only pay their fair share of costs, redemption centers receive pick-ups as frequently as needed, and they are paid promptly for the work that they do. The new cooperative would also have a board of directors that represents all stakeholders in the Bottle Bill. LD 1910 includes none of these provisions.

Thank you for consideration of my comments, and thank you for your efforts to ensure that Maine's most successful recycling program continues to benefit Maine's people and the environment well into the future. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.