

Maine Grocers &
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NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST - LD 479 An Act to Facilitate Expansion of the State's Recycling Efforts Under the Beverage Container Redemption Program

Dear Senator Tepler - Chair, Representative Doudera - Chair, and members of the committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

My name is Christine Cummings and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Grocers & Food Producers Association (MGFPA). The Maine Grocers & Food Producers Association is a business trade association representing Maine's food community; Main Street businesses, including independently owned and operated grocery stores and supermarkets, food and beverage producers and processors, manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and supportive service companies.

We are appreciative of the intent of LD 479 to study expanding Maine's bottle bill program to include additional containers and sizes as well as reviewing the inclusion of other glass containers but we question whether or not this is the most opportune time to do so.

Maine's current bottle bill has proven effective in reducing litter and increasing recycling rates. Expanding it to cover additional glass containers—could further decrease waste in our landfills and prevent glass from ending up in our natural landscapes. "Studies suggest that modernizing bottle bills by expanding the range of eligible containers and increasing deposit amounts can elevate redemption rates to 90% or more."¹ As noted in the Annual Stewardship Report, "In addition to preventing widespread litter from improper disposal of beverage containers, the program remains a successful collection system for beverage containers with estimated recovery rates of 72% to 85%, well above Maine's overall statewide waste diversion rate of 33.8%² and the national recycling and composting rate of 32.1%."²

Other bottle redemption programs including Oregon, Massachusetts, and Iowa have seen mixed effectiveness in changes to their programs. Expanding the program would require adjustments to deposit handling fees, distributor responsibilities, and retailer compliance. A sudden expansion without a clear funding mechanism could place unintended financial burdens on businesses and consumers.

While redemption centers could benefit from increased volume, they are already under pressure due to labor shortages and rising operational expenses. Handling more glass could require additional storage space and new processing equipment, which might not be feasible for all facilities. We question what the expansion of other glass packaging may mean for the material as it relates to a readily recyclable material in the EPR for packaging program. While glass is recyclable, Maine must consider a strategy for the material within two competing recycling programs.

We question the scope of the expansion related to items outside of beverage containers. Glass containers can range from pickles, sauces, olives, jams & jellies, peanut butter, mustards, mayonnaise, and oils, to baby food. Is the intent to also cover nonfood related items such as candles, skin care, cleaning liquids, vitamins, and other products glass packaging? It's currently unclear as to whether or not the bottle bill or EPR may prove to be more environmentally effective or cost-effective for producers. Adding a deposit fee to more glass containers may place a financial burden on consumers,

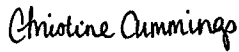
¹ <https://bottlebillreimagined.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Reimagining-the-Bottle-Bill-FINAL-JUNE-2022.pdf>

² Annual Product Stewardship Report, 2025

particularly in lower-income communities. Additionally, retailers and distributors would need to adjust their logistics and administration to comply with the expanded law, potentially increasing costs for small businesses. If the study is to move forward, it will be key to understand how a mandated comprehensive bottle bill may work in relation to the EPR for packaging program's small business exemption; how will the State determine what manufacturers and materials are required to participate?

We question the timing of the proposed study as it relates to the modernization of the current bottle bill program and the paralleling effort to launch Maine's EPR of packaging program. Expanding the bottle redemption program to include more container types and sizes as well as other items has the potential to improve recycling rates and environmental outcomes. We acknowledge that the success of such initiatives depends on effective implementation, public participation, and supportive infrastructure. The proposal while intriguing to study, may be premature as the effectiveness of two significant stewardship policies are at critical points in their development. We question if the study is better suited at a later point when other infrastructure, effectiveness, and pricing details are available. Waiting may allow the state to adopt best practices and avoid costly missteps.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.



Christine Cummings
Executive Director