



CENTRAL DISTRIBUTORS, INC.

Maine's Leading Beverage Distributor

**Testimony in Support of
LD 2036**

**RE: An Act to Clarify the Approval Process for... Commingling Program...
February 4, 2026**

Good afternoon, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.

My name is Mike Barriault, and I am the President of Central Distributors in Lewiston and also Aroostook Beverage in Presque Isle. We are an independent Maine owned beverage distributor operated by my family since 1934. My sister, cousin and I represent the 4th generation of our family to continue the legacy of our company delivering beverages to Maine retailers throughout the state. We are a good company with good jobs and benefits for approximately 180 Maine people.

I am also here this morning representing our trade association comprised of other family owned and operated beverage distributors here in the state of Maine. We are the Maine Beverage Distributors Association. Collectively, we warehouse and deliver many popular beverages throughout the state, including Coors, Miller, and Budweiser brands, and local Maine breweries such as Maine Beer Company, Allagash, and Atlantic in Bar Harbor. Our wine portfolio includes wines from all over the world, and our non-alcohol offerings range from Poland Spring and Polar Beverages to teas, juices, and energy drinks.

For decades our distributorships have successfully operated the bottle bill since its inception in the 70s. Our trucks deliver full beverages to Maine retailers and pick up empty beverage containers on our way home.

Finally, the hat I wear for this particular testimony today is as President of the Maine Beverage Redemption Group (MBRG), which is commonly referred to as the COOP, or the Cooperative of Commingling Groups. We are a non-profit organization established to execute on the 2023 legislation to commingle all beverages of similar material type and size creating efficiencies for redemption centers.

The members of the cooperative have been hard at work figuring out fair governance, sharing best practices, and developing plans to ensure success by October 2026. It has selected leadership, including me as its president and vice presidents from each commingling group, and I can assure you that we have been working hard to help lead this group to be as successful as possible by October 2026.

We have worked tirelessly with the DEP and new staff members to try and put forth a plan that can work as best as possible for all stakeholders. Through sometimes weekly meetings, seemingly endless email threads and constant dialogue, we have been very open and candid about suggestions that we think can work, suggestions that we do not think will work, and areas that work well right now and should require little to no alteration. Throughout the course of the plan development process we learned DEP had different interpretations of the statute on a few major areas that radically change the program as envisioned (such as financial flows).

We are here today to ask for your support of this bill as it will help us to work through some unanticipated challenges that we have discovered.

The most significant issue we have faced is with a strict interpretation that:

“...unclaimed deposits... must be deposited and maintained by the cooperative in a separate account or accounts”

And seemingly more restrictive, rules that require:

“...the deposit by the cooperative into and the maintenance by the cooperative of a segregated accounts or accounts, separate from all over revenues, of the refund value for all nonrefillable beverage containers”

The strict interpretation appears to require that every deposit initiated/sold must be funded into the cooperative. This sounds obviously necessary at first, but it ignores the fact that initiators of deposit like myself are not only collecting deposits from sales on a daily basis, but we are also redeeming deposits to redemption centers on a daily basis. Therefore, a strict interpretation of the statute would require that I would transfer money to the cooperative that I have already paid out to redemption centers.

Our current “work-around” is a proposal for each group at the end of a period to:

1. Transfer into the cooperative the refund value of all deposits initiated/sold (even if already paid to redemption centers), only to...
2. Receive a near-immediate reimbursement for the deposits they redeemed

It is logical that each commingling group should have to only transmit the **NET difference between Deposits Sold and Deposits Redeemed**, preventing each group from paying in monies that have already been paid to redemption centers.

Regardless of NET monies exchanged, we fully understand and support the **full accounting of ALL deposits sold and redeemed** for proper reporting and transparency about the use of unclaimed deposits to fund other bottle bill related programs and costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.