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JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING
ON 2024-2025 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT FISCAL COMMITTEES OF THE NEW YORK STATE
SENATE AND NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

February 7, 2024

My name is Elisabeth Radow. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today. I am the Environmental Specialist for the League of Women’s Voters of New York State. The League is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization with a mission to educate the public to become engaged members of their communities and informed voters, notably on issues that affect the public good. The League urges the Legislature and Governor Hochul to include the proposed so-called Bigger Better Bottle Bill (S237/A6353) in this coming fiscal year’s budget funding to accommodate an expanded and modernized bottle bill.

The Recycling Crisis

In New York State, on average, each person generates more than 4.5 pounds of trash daily. New York handles its trash by incineration or at one of 25 – 30 active landfills that accept roughly 6 million tons of waste per year from across the state.¹ A significant portion of the trash deposited in landfills consists of plastic which cannot fully decompose; instead it transforms into particulates that contaminate soil, water, food cycles, and our bodies.² NYS already experiences a variety of climate hazards and chronic conditions due to the presence of escalating decomposed plastic waste and therefore requires focus and action on improved waste management.

Since 2008, one-half of the bottle and can (hereinafter collectively referred to as “bottle”) redemption centers throughout New York State have shut down. Since the original Bottle Bill was introduced in 1983, the last time major amendments were added to this law was in 2009.³ Currently, for each bottle a consumer redeems, the consumer receives 5¢ back, and the authorized redemption center forwards that money to the consumer, before later getting reimbursed by the distributing company 3.5¢ per item redeemed. This low rate of return for

¹https://nyassembly.gov/write/upload/req/solid_waste.pdf?v=1683830140#:~:text=We%20make%20over%204.5%20pounds,year%20from%20across%20the%20state.

²<https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/waste-management/solid-waste-management-facilities/landfill-types#:~:text=Currently%2C%20there%20are%2025%20active%20MSW%20landfills%20in%20New%20York%20State.>

³<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9602440/#:~:text=Most%20of%20the%20polymers%20and,to%20gaseous%20products%20and%20water.>

³<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2023/10/24/lawmakers-probe-bottle-bill-as-redemption-centers-threaten-to-close>

consumers discourages public participation in the redemption process. Further, the redemption centers are expected to function on 2009 income in 2023 resulting in small to non-existent profits. As a result, redemption centers are shutting down at a rapid pace; during the period of 2022-2023, one hundred redemption centers shut down. This failure to modernize the bottle recycling process has resulted in reduced accessibility to many New Yorkers, loss of jobs, an escalating recycling crisis, and a corresponding rise in pollution that adversely impacts the climate, the environment and human health.

Expanding the New York State Bottle Bill

New York's long-standing Bottle Bill has been effective. It was introduced at a time when New York's landfills were rapidly approaching capacity. Once in effect, the Bottle Bill proved to help reduce litter across the state. In 2022, New York showed a redemption rate of 69.9%.⁴ This redemption rate, while laudable, nevertheless fails to keep pace with the escalating production of single use beverage packaging. In short, since 1983 New York's overall waste crisis has expanded while, as mentioned above, the underfunded redemption centers are closing across the state at record rates.

It has been demonstrated that raising the bottle deposit from 5¢ to 10¢ can fund the bottle redemption infrastructure and long-term security to the redemption centers, while likewise creating a greater consumer incentive to recycle. Further, as proposed by the current update of New York's Bottle Bill, expanding the types of beverages to be accepted at redemption centers will capture more single use containers. In states that have instituted a 10¢ deposit, the redemption rates observed in 2022 float around 76%-86%.⁵ It is estimated that fully modernizing the Bottle Bill in New York State will result in a recycling rate of beverage containers moving from 69% to 92%.⁶ In addition, modernization of the Bottle Bill is estimated to result in a reduction of greenhouse gasses by 550,000 metric tons yearly⁷, the creation of new jobs and up to \$349 million reclaimed and infused into the economy⁸.

Modernizing New York's Bottle Bill reflects a common sense, achievable step to incentivize consumers to recycle beverage containers, update and restore a functional system within

⁴ <https://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/current-and-proposed-laws/usa/new-york>

⁵ <https://resource-recycling.com/plastics/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/08/CRI-redemption-rates-for-2022-updated.pdf>

⁶ <https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/03/reloop-report-press-release.pdf>

⁷ reference footnote 6

⁸ <https://bottlebillreimagined.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Reimagining-the-Bottle-Bill-FINAL-JUNE-2022.pdf>
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redemption centers, and create a greater potential to reduce pollution, preserve the environment and achieve a more sustainable quality of life for our citizens.

Conclusion

Inclusion of an expanded bottle bill could produce \$171M-349M⁹ in revenue for New York State. The League of Women Voters of New York State asks the Senate and Assembly to include an expanded bottle bill in their one house budgets to address this urgent crisis.

In closing, the League appreciates the environmental commitments made in the Governor's executive budget. Respectfully, a stronger commitment is needed to address some of the most pressing environmental issues of our time, one of which has been reflected in today's testimony because of dire need which could be matched by a proven track record and promise for success. In sum, for the reasons stated above, expanding the Bottle Bill reflects a key resolution to one of New York's prevalent solid waste pollution challenges.

We therefore respectfully urge the State legislature to consider and adopt the requests made in today's testimony to ensure that New York State continues to lead the way on climate action. Thank you for your consideration.

⁹ reference footnote 8, pg. 34