

OPPOSE

LD 1324 – An Act To Create Consistency and Fairness in Maine’s Bottle Bill

Sponsor: Representative PRESCOTT of Topsham

Co-Sponsors: Representatives CUSHING of Hampden, DOW of Waldoboro, FITTS of Pittsfield, HAYES of Buckfield, PILON of Saco, TILTON of Harrington, WEAVER of York, WINTLE of Garland; and Senator MARTIN of Kennebec

Summary: The bill would exempt any beverage container larger than 28 ounces from Maine’s bottle-deposit recycling law (the bottle bill). The bill also would establish a uniform deposit of 5 cents for all containers.

Explanation: Maine’s bottle bill is our state’s most successful recycling program, with a consistent recycling rate of between 85 and 95%. It has helped to create and support hundreds of small business all around the state, and is currently responsible for more than 1,300 jobs. In addition, it relieves towns and taxpayers of the physical and financial burdens and costs of paying to collect and recycle these containers. It has also served as a great tool for local fundraising efforts, including for sports teams, boy scouts, and other youth programs statewide.

Before the bottle bill was adopted, Maine’s roadsides littered with beverage containers. After the law was enacted and implemented, our roadsides were dramatically cleaned up. The bottle bill also helped spur the idea of a recycling ethic for Maine citizens. The law is so popular that when the beverage industry attempted to repeal it by referendum in 1979, 85% of Maine people voted against the repeal.

Unfortunately, the same corporate beverage interests that opposed Maine’s bottle bill in 1976, and attempted to repeal it in 1979, are still interested in weakening and eventually eliminating the bottle bill. Their preferred approach is to repeal Maine’s bottle bill and replace it with a weak program involving grants to municipalities to encourage recycling – an approach that would fail in all the ways that Maine’s bottle bill now is a success. This strategy is playing out in Vermont, where Coca-Cola has led the effort to introduce such legislation. The sponsor of a similar bill here in Maine appears to have withdrawn his proposal this session.

In the interim, the beverage industry is attempting to chip away at the bottle bill through LD 1324 by exempting containers greater than 28 oz - essentially all 32 oz, 1 liter, 2 liter soda, juice, water and sports drink bottles, as well as all wine, most liquor and large beer containers. These containers effectively represent about 15% to 20% of the total amount of containers covered by the bottle bill. The beverage industry claims that people do not litter with these containers, and; therefore, they should be exempt from the law. A cursory survey of any convenience store, however, demonstrates that people buy beverages in these size containers to drink while driving.

Exempting these larger beverage containers is a strategy by the beverage industry to transfer costs to towns and taxpayers. Exempting the significant volume of larger containers from the bottle bill means that a high percentage likely would end up along roadways and in landfills, and the elimination of this segment of containers would have an impact on the economics of Maine’s bottle bill. Maine’s current bottle bill results in recycling of 85-95% of the beverage containers sold into Maine. In non-bottle bill states, the average is 24%. LD 1324 attempts to fix something that isn’t broken.

NRCM opposes LD 1324.