

NEWS RELEASE

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Long Island Groups Deliver Letter to Governor Hochul And Department of Environmental Conservation Calling on the State to Release Grants to Struggling Redemption Centers

Facing a mounting waste crisis, small business owners and advocates call for DEC intervention to release grant funding for struggling redemption centers, many of which have closed over the last decade, putting consumer access to redemption at risk.

(Mineola) On Tuesday, September 26th at 11AM, advocates and small business owners hosted a press conference and rally outside Governor Hochul's Mineola office urging her to take immediate action to release grant funds to struggling redemption centers, non-profits, and businesses in the state through the Beverage Container Assistance Program. Since 2008, 52 percent of the state's redemption centers have closed.

Following the press conference, Long Island organizations delivered a letter to the Governor signed by over 300 organizations from across the state urging her to direct the DEC to release funds from the Beverage Container Assistance Program to struggling businesses. Redemption centers have been told it can take years for their application to be processed. With redemption centers buckling under the weight of increased wages, rent, and expenses, New York's consumers risk losing critical access to return their beverage containers, jeopardizing the state's highly successful Bottle Law, and the state's overall sustainability goals.

Redemption Centers are a convenient and crucial piece of the state's recycling infrastructure, especially as it pertains to the Bottle Law. They are often the easiest place for consumers to return their bottles and cans, because there are no limitations placed on the containers that they accept, unlike grocery and convenience stores, which only need to accept back brands that they sell. For this reason, they are also crucial to the state's thousands of independent recyclers, or "canners," individuals that rely on recycling deposit-eligible containers for income. Without working redemption centers, the overall deposit system cannot function as it is meant to, for consumers, workers, or the state.

"As President of the Empire State Redemption Association, I speak for over 120 Redemption Centers when I say our industry needs the New York State Government to act now! 50% of registered Redemption Centers have gone out of business since 2008. The Bottle Bill passed in 2009 states that DEC has the power to provide redemption centers grants for labor, technology, and overhead costs, yet it would seem as if the program has never been utilized. Now more than ever, NYS Redemption Centers need a boost in our handling fee and access to grant

funding as outlined in the 2009 Bottle Bill Legislation,” **said Martin Naro, President of the Empire State Redemption Association.**

In order for the system to thrive and continue to divert waste from municipal waste facilities, it is essential that these businesses are offered a critical lifeline. The Bottle Law explicitly states that the DEC has the authority to issue grants in Section 27-1018 through the Beverage Container Assistance Program. This program grants the agency the authority to issue grants for “costs of equipment, and/or the acquisition and/or rehabilitation of real property or structures located or to be located in the state related to the collecting, sorting, and packaging of empty beverage containers.”

“Glass disposal issues are just one of the reasons why the Bottle Bill is such an integral part of our infrastructure in dealing with solid waste. But for the Bottle Bill to work, we need redemption centers,” **said Karen Zilber, of All Our Energy.**

The Department has not implemented the Beverage Container Assistance Program for many years which has contributed to the closure of redemption centers and the crisis they face today. The New York legislature should take swift action during next year’s legislative session in order to save this struggling industry, and improve recycling rates by expanding the Bottle Deposit Law. However, in the meantime, the Department should also work with redemption centers to provide robust support for small businesses, not-for-profits and municipalities to fully implement the current Bottle Deposit Law. DEC has an opportunity to ease the burden of many struggling New York redemption centers, non-profits, and businesses desperately seeking aid.

“The degree of inaction in the face of an overwhelming crisis New York’s leaders are demonstrating is staggering. The DEC seems to have forsaken its responsibility to maintain the state’s most effective and empowering recycling system, and thereby its responsibility to safeguard the health of our communities. Lack of resources or bureaucratic obstacles are resolvable problems. A three-to-five-year wait for critical resources mandated by law to support essential workers and an industry on the cusp of collapse is simply unacceptable,” **said Ryan Castalia, Executive Director of Sure We Can,** Brooklyn’s largest non-profit redemption center.

First enacted in 1982, the New York State Returnable Container Act, commonly known as the “Bottle Bill,” requires a 5-cent refundable deposit to be placed on eligible beverage containers. The law requires retailers who sell covered beverages to accept returns of empty containers for the products they sell and refund the deposits, and it requires beverage distributors to pay retailers a handling fee for the cost of collecting and recycling empty containers. While rent and wages have increased, the handling fee has not been increased in more than a decade.

Over its 40-year history, New York’s Bottle Bill has proven highly effective at reducing litter and increasing recycling rates. In 2020, New York’s redemption rate was at 64%. The Bottle Bill reduces roadside container litter by 70%, and in 2020, 5.5 billion containers were recycled in the state. Now, advocates say, it’s time to modernize the law for a new era. Beverage containers are the third most littered item in the state.

Last year, Assemblymember Deborah Glick and Senator Rachel May introduced the modernized Bigger Better Bottle Bill, which would expand the types and number of beverage containers covered by the law, and increase the deposit to a dime, while increasing the handling fee from 3.5 to 6 cents.

Advocates are hopeful that the Governor will include the bill in her Executive Budget next year. An expanded program is called on in the state's Climate Action Council Scoping Plan and the DEC's own Ten Year Waste Management Plan.

“State funding to support New York redemption centers is at a bottleneck. Half of the state's redemption centers have closed since 2008 which exacerbates New York's response to its solid waste crisis. The Department of Environmental Conservation already has a program in place to help, The Beverage Container Assistance Program, which could give immediate relief to the state's struggling redemption industry. While recyclers and advocates work to expand the state's most effective litter prevention law, the Bigger Better Bottle Bill, the DEC must act now to immediately release the funds in the Beverage Container Assistance Program,” **said Ryan Thoresen Carson, Senior Solid Waste Campaign Manager at NYPIRG.**

Specifically, the Bigger Better Bottle Bill includes three modernizations, it:

- **Expands the types and number of beverage containers covered by the Bottle Bill.** Other states from Maine to California include a diverse range of non-carbonated beverages, wine, and liquor with great success.
- **Increases the amount of the deposit to a dime.** States like Michigan and Oregon that have increased their deposit to a dime have seen increases in recycling and container redemption rates.
- **Raises the handling fee from 3.5 to 6 cents.** California's legislature just approved a similar measure to adjust the handling fee. Earlier this summer, Maine Governor Janet Mills did the same by executive order.

States that have a bottle deposit are 46% more likely to recycle bottles than states that do not. Expanding the Bottle Bill would reduce or eliminate these costs for municipal programs by creating a financial incentive (the deposit) for consumers to return and an obligation (the law) for retailers to accept these containers, relieving the burden on local government recycling programs.

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