

Dear Representatives of the Mount Vernon District:

Virginia needs a beverage container deposit law in order to reduce litter waste, especially in Virginia streams and rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Such a law also would conserve energy and natural resources (such as aluminum), and could provide revenue for the Commonwealth.

My neighbors and I observe and remove an enormous amount of trash from our local creek. Under the auspices of the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Potomac-wide cleanup, the Friends of Little Hunting Creek have picked up bottles and trash from the creek and shoreline every spring since 2001. Last year, for example, 82 volunteers working at 8 sites along our creek picked up 119 bags of trash and recyclables (along with 10 tires and other items).

Cleanups of the sort we conduct are at the heart of Virginia's litter reduction program. Establishments (such as our local 7-11) pay a litter tax of \$25 dollars a year which goes in part to sponsor and fund voluntary citizen cleanups. Curbside recycling programs also prevent recyclable material from being tossed out as litter. However, Virginia's solid waste recycling rate (reported by the Department of Environmental Quality) appears to have plateaued at less than 39 percent for the past decade.

Current programs are clearly inadequate, because the amount of trash is unending and overwhelming. The Friends of Little Hunting Creek could have gone out a few days later and picked up just as much trash as we picked up during our cleanup. Much of it, by the way, is from our local 7-11 (we can identify some trash by label). The \$25 litter tax that 7-11 pays per year would cover the equivalent of about an hour and a half of a volunteer's time, a gross understatement of the amount of labor that would actually be needed to pick up the litter generated by one convenience store over the course of a year.

Picking up other peoples' litter and trash is dirty, dangerous, disgusting, and a waste of my and other volunteers' time. I personally am sick and tired of it. It makes me angry that a recent brochure produced by industry ("Virginia Business: Putting Its Money Where Its Mouth Is to Support a Cleaner Virginia") brags about the 395,627 hours of volunteer labor that have been dedicated to citizen cleanups of bottle litter, as if that represents an industry accomplishment rather than a disgrace. The answer, it seems to me, is to stop relying on the labor of people who don't litter and offer incentives to stop the littering by people who do.

Perhaps three quarters by volume of what we collect is beverage containers—water bottles, soda bottles and cans, beer cans—all of which are potentially recyclable. (Unfortunately, most of what we retrieve from the creek cannot be recycled because it's full of mud or broken or disintegrated.)

Nationally, only 48% of aluminum beer and soft drink cans, 28% of glass containers, and 27% of PET bottles and jars were recycled in 2008, according to data assembled by the Container Recycling Institute.

A deposit on all plastic, metal, and glass beverage containers creates an incentive for people to return them to redeem the deposit, rather than toss them by the roadside, in a park, etc. In the eleven states with beverage container deposit laws, recycling rates are much higher than in states that do not have them, according to statistics provided by the Beverage Container Institute. The 11 U.S. states with container deposit laws consistently recycle containers that are covered under their laws at rates between 66 – 96%. The 39 states without deposit programs average 35% recycling rates for aluminum cans, 14% for PET plastic, and 12% for glass bottles.

As a consequence, litter is drastically reduced in states that adopt beverage container deposits. Beverage container litter is reduced between 70 and 84 percent, and total litter is reduced between 34 and 47 percent, when bottle deposit laws are adopted (Bottle Bill Resource Guide).

States with bottle deposit laws realize net economic benefits from sale of beverage containers to recycling markets, reduced litter and waste management costs, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, bottle deposits could potentially generate significant net revenue for the Commonwealth of Virginia. For example, a 2005 study prepared for the City of Tacoma, Washington projected that the State of Washington would reap \$32 million in net benefits from a beverage container deposit system operated through redemption centers. A well-designed bottle deposit program similarly could create jobs and provide revenues to the Commonwealth at a time when they are sorely needed. Some portion of revenues (e.g., from unclaimed deposits) might also be retained by industry to help cover operational costs.

Sincerely,

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