

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Jesse Leffler and over the past 13 years I have owned and operated two redemption centers in the Capital Region with my business partner, Sean Dropchinski.

I am writing today to stress the importance of amending the NYS bottle bill during this upcoming legislative session. Without an update to this bill, you will continue to see bottle redemption centers close across the state, consumers lose access to an acceptable avenue to redeem their beverage containers, and landfills, local communities and our natural environment filling up with unredeemed recyclable material.

The NYS Bottle Bill determines how much a bottle redemption center receives for each “sorted” NYS redeemable beverage container processed through that facility. Many people do not realize just how much labor goes into the sorting process. For a redemption center to receive the full 3.5 cent handling fee a container must be sorted by size, type of material and distributor. Trust me, it’s a lot of sorting. The 3.5 cent handling fee has been the same since 2009. Redemption centers are unique in that they are a free service and cannot pass increased operational expenses onto their customers like most other types of businesses. With the rise in inflation and the yearly state mandated increases in minimum wage, it is not difficult to see how redemption centers are being forced to close across the state.

It has been a huge disappointment to us that NYS has failed to do its job in maintaining a proven effective system of recycling in our state. It is equally disappointing to see just how much money the state brings in each year from unredeemed beverage containers, (well over \$100M), none of which is being reinvested back into the system to make it stronger. Every year we see the number of containers processed at our facilities increase while our profit margin decreases. My business partner and I have both taken at least a \$40,000/year pay cut from just four years ago. It’s incredibly disheartening to work harder and harder each year to only see your profits shrink. Our first step in combatting this is to reduce staffing, eventually leading to closing the doors. During the pandemic, redemption centers were deemed an “essential” business, and it was easy to see why with the line of pickup trucks filled with bottles wrapping around our facilities from open to close for months following just a couple week shutdown.

With redemption centers being forced to close across the state, consumers are losing access to a convenient way to redeem their beverage containers. If anyone has ever been to the reverse vending machines at the grocery store they would know how incredibly ineffective they are at processing any more than a small bag of bottles in a timely manner. In addition, they would never be able to absorb the increased volume forced upon them as a result of redemption centers closing. For reference our two redemption centers process roughly 16M containers

annually. Grocery store reverse vending machines process one container at a time, are programmed to take back only what that store sells and are often down for maintenance. Redemption centers typically do not have a max on the amount of containers that can be redeemed and take all brands with a NYS five cent deposit. This makes it a much better option for consumers to claim their bottle deposit.

Lastly, everyone is very much aware of the incredibly large variety of beverages now available to consumers for purchase at any store across the state. The current bottle bill puts a deposit on containers based on what kind of beverage is in the container as opposed to what the container is made of. For example, a soda can has a deposit, a hard cider in the same can does not. This discrepancy is confusing to consumers and leads to a large volume of recyclable material making it to the landfill that would otherwise be captured in the system.

In closing, it is our opinion that it is inconsistent with the values of NYS to mandate a deposit for many beverage containers all while not supporting a system to redeem them by failing to update the bottle bill, and then profiting from that negligence. We hope that this is the year NYS backs the hardworking redemption centers across the state and updates the bottle bill accordingly.

Sincerely,

Jesse Leffler

Sean Dropchinski

Creating Change Redemption Center

Green Bottle Redemption Center