

My name is Erin Sparks, and I am the owner of Two Cans Redemption center, which is deeply engaged in promoting sustainability and responsible waste management in New York State. I am writing to express my strong support for increasing the deposit from 5 cents to 10 cents and expanding the New York State Bottle Bill to cover additional beverage containers. I would like to share the struggles that redemption centers like ours are facing, particularly with inadequate handling fees, staffing shortages, and financial pressures that threaten the viability of our operation.

Since New York's Bottle Bill was first introduced, it has helped keep our communities cleaner by reducing litter and encouraging recycling. Redemption Centers like ours are a key part of this system, making it easy for people to return their bottles and cans and get their deposit back. But the system hasn't been updated in nearly two decades, and we're now struggling to keep up with rising costs and new challenges. Without the proper changes, it's getting harder for us to stay open and continue serving our communities.

The handling fee we get paid for processing bottles and cans is just 3.5 cents per container, and it hasn't gone up in nearly TWO DECADES. Meanwhile the cost of running a redemption center – like paying for workers, rent, utilities, and equipment- keeps going up. The small fee doesn't cover what we need to keep our doors open, let alone pay employees a fair wage.

One of the most pressing challenges we face due to the handling fee is the inability to hire and retain employees. The handling fees we receive are insufficient to offer competitive wages, especially as the cost of living continues to rise. Minimum wage keeps increasing but our wages stay the same. We cannot consciously hire with the fear of not being able to meet our payroll needs. Again, this results in working excessive hours and closing to keep up with the number of containers we bring in. Sorting and processing thousands of containers daily is physically taxing, making it difficult to attract workers, particularly when wages do not reflect the effort required. Many individuals are seeking employment opportunities in other industries that offer better pay and benefits, leaving redemption centers struggling to fill positions.

In the absence of employees, many redemption centers owners and family members are working long hours themselves, often without pay, just to keep their business running. EX) I have worked until 3:30 in the morning just to catch up. I have also slept in the office of my business due to being too tired to drive home. We have the clientele and the

volume – We do NOT have the wages to match it. Many times, we go without even paying ourselves, as business owners, due to the lack of funding.

Beverage container litter accounts for a significant portion of waste in parks, waterways, and streets. Doubling the deposit will reduce this litter and contribute to cleaner communities statewide. It has also been discussed in previous sessions that our landfills only have 10-15 years left before they are closed. Adding containers to the Bottle Bill will help ease that burden significantly. I will attach pictures of the non-returnable containers our location brings in. While the DEC regulations state we can turn them away, that does not guarantee that the consumer will not just simply place them in the garbage. EX) When the bottle bill was created the liquor stores were not selling ready-to-drinks. They are now but those containers do NOT have a NYS deposit on them. The popularity of these drinks has increased significantly, which has taken away from our profit. Simply put, ALL containers should be included in the Bottle Bill, or the system does not make any sense. We need the state to reduce this burden and immediately add additional containers.

While I understand concerns about the financial impact on businesses, implementing changes to the deposit and expansion will ultimately benefit retailers and redemption centers by increasing efficiency and reducing the environmental footprint of their operations. Adjustments to handling fees for redemption centers should also be part of this modernization to ensure their sustainability and operational success.

Without immediate legislative support, many redemption centers will be forced to close. This will create significant challenges for consumers trying to redeem their deposits, lead to increased litter, and undermine the success of New York's Bottle Bill. EX) Many of our customers have stated that if redemption centers do not exist, they will simply throw the containers out. They refuse to go to a corporate company and feed the machines there. Often, they will have to go to multiple stores to do so if they make purchases at different box stores. That is not something they are willing to do when they have been spoiled at our location with a machine that counts 1k cans in less than 3 minutes.

Modernizing the Bottle Bill is a win for our communities, economy, and environment. Increasing the deposit to 10 cents and expanding container coverage will make a measurable difference in reducing litter, increasing recycling, and supporting New York's commitment to sustainability. Studies show that states with higher deposit amounts, such as Michigan, experience redemption rates exceeding 90%. Increasing the deposit to 10 cents will incentivize more individuals to return their containers, reducing litter and increasing recycling rates. I urge the Legislature to take bold action, follow suit, and update the Bottle Bill to reflect the needs of today. If we do not receive a raise during this session,

we predict that NYS will see the 25% closure increase to 50% or more. The current system is no longer sustainable for many of us, and without immediate action, more centers will be forced to close their doors.

While I am asking for IMMEDIATE revision of The Bottle Bill to support today's economic needs, I am also asking Legislature to find IMMEDIATE funding to save our centers from the current crisis we are in at no fault of our own. Instead of using the system to benefit the general fund we need our NYS government to put that money back into the system that generates it. There is no reason at this point that an entire industry is facing a poverty level due to the lack of action by our legislative government.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and for your leadership in safeguarding New York's environment.

Sincerely,

Erin Sparks, Owner

Two-Cans Redemption Center

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