

MT Returnables

Bottle Redemption Center

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Testimony of Jade Eddy

Owner/Operator of MT Returnables

Joint Legislative Hearing to Examine Legislative Solutions to Increase Effectiveness of the Bottle Bill

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On behalf of all privately owned redemption centers in New York, I thank you for allowing us to become a part of the conversation regarding the Bottle Bill. Due to lack of bill maintenance, New York has run into a number of issues regarding this program. I will address those issues in order of priority:

Handling Fee

The current text of the Bottle Bill in no way has any written obligation to ensure the handling fee being paid to businesses processing New York's redeemable containers is updated to keep up with inflation. This has caused insane lengths of time to pass before the issue is addressed. Often causing businesses to be financially strained to the point of closure before seeing the raise needed to continue operations. We are seeing this issue arise now. The last time the handling fee was increased was in 2009. Businesses are closing at an alarming and increasing rate (over 60 redemption centers lost in the last year) because the financial responsibilities we have in 2023 differ greatly than they did in 2009. Our expenses have more than doubled in the last 15 years, but our pay has not increased at all. And unlike most industries, we have no power to help ourselves without state legislation. We cannot simply adjust pricing to accommodate rising costs. Minimum wage is now being adjusted to keep up with inflation. Our handling fee needs to be mandated in the same way so that we can properly be able to keep up with the wage mandates being imposed on us. We need our legislators to act on our behalf. We not only need to implement an emergency increase in the handling fee to go into effect immediately, like the state of Maine did in May, but we also need to add a provision to the bottle bill itself to ensure that this issue is addressed every few years to keep businesses operational. Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner has introduced a standalone bill (A3375) addressing our handling fee. Having our rate of pay tied to failing legislation year after year is what has gotten us to this critical point. We need to ensure separation moving forward so we are not in this crisis ever again.

Store Mandate

Under the current Bottle Bill rules, any store that sells a beverage must legally take the empty container back. Believe it or not, this even includes pharmacies. This made sense when the bill was introduced in the 80s, as bottle redemption centers did not exist, and there were not nearly as many containers being produced. But with the addition of redemption centers and a significant increase in the number of beverages on the market now, this mandate has become outdated. Many stores have become severely overwhelmed, resulting in them resorting to throwing containers away rather than them being recycled. Going against the very purpose of this bill.

This is in large part because the state has allowed one company to monopolize most of the industry and they simply cannot handle the load. Tomra Recycling is close to solely responsible for picking up the containers from all redemption centers, grocery, and convenience stores. They are spread too thin having to go to so many locations, and often, they are leaving someone stuck with product piling up in their store. Which results in issues with pest and rodent infestations. Many of today's grocery and convenience stores now serve food and lack storage space for piling up containers. This poses both a

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However, some of us do understand that with surrounding states moving to an increased deposit, it increases our competition. Though we know that it is a federal offense to cross state lines to redeem containers, many consumers do not. Those close to a neighboring state border with a higher deposit may be tempted to bring their containers where they will be paid more. It would be in our best interest to keep them incentivized to stay within New York and follow the law. It has been proven that the implementation of the Bottle Bill caused the rate of recycling to skyrocket. Increasing the financial incentive would surely have a positive impact on the rate of recycling. But if we double the deposit amount, we need to implement that change in a strategic and thoughtful way. Businesses who are already struggling will not survive having to pay out double the amount immediately. We need to have an increased handling fee first, for a length of time, to prepare for the increased financial burden.

Summary

In short, the Bottle Bill is well overdue for updates. And none of the changes to it will be meaningful without redemption centers surviving. New York can make all the containers in existence returnable, but without redemption centers, there will be no logical place for them to go. Grocery and convenience stores are already overwhelmed under the current broken system. They simply will not survive being burdened with more because of our demise.

Communities all over New York will suffer greatly from the continued closures of redemption centers. What many fail to acknowledge is that our businesses offer necessary secondary income to everyday struggling citizens. Many people return their bottles to put \$20 in their gas tank so that they can get to work. Or to buy their kids' school lunch that week. We also offer significant fundraising opportunities for various causes. Churches, sports teams, boy and girl scout troops, those who have suffered from a house fire or medical debt; they all use redemption centers to fundraise significant amounts of money for their causes. Grocery and convenience stores cannot offer the same opportunities to these consumers that we do. We also help ensure that event businesses can recycle rather than throw away their containers. One redemption center in Western New York takes the containers from the Buffalo Bills stadium, resulting in a significant number of containers not finding their way to a landfill.

New York is at a fork in the road. We either take the necessary action to keep this program successful, ensuring our environment benefits from continued recycling, keeping tax paying businesses open and create more job opportunities. Or we fail to act yet again and see an entire industry collapse, causing significant job loss and hurt our communities with the comeback of litter and loss of vital financial resources. New York touts itself as one of the leading states when it comes to addressing the issues of climate change and harm to our environment. I trust that with this information in hand, you will make the right choice and act swiftly to save our environment and the businesses needed to accomplish that task.

Sincerely,
Jade Eddy

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Oral Testimony: Jade Eddy

My father started my redemption business in 2005. We have survived slow seasons, a fire, a pandemic and his unexpected death. When he died in 2020, I had to fight like hell to reopen. And while we were battling the state for bottle bill help when he was still alive, I certainly did not imagine I would have to be standing here before you today to save the entire industry.

It has been nearly 16 years since New York has passed any legislation regarding the bottle bill. This has caused a multitude of issues I don't have time to address here right now but will be included in my written submission. My priority today should be yours as well. The handling fee. I beg the question to you all, would you be able to survive on your 2009 pay, while paying today's expenses? How about 3.5 cents? Because that is exactly what is expected of us. All of our expenses have at least doubled. Everything from the cost of our trash to payroll has gone up.

Minimum wage has increased 11 times. With 3 more increases heading our way. And with each wage increase, comes an increase on our insurance for employees as well. We are being crippled because the state has left us so far behind. Our industry is like no other. We are 100% state legislated. We do not have the power to adjust pricing to accommodate rising expenses, like restaurants or retailers. We must rely on legislators to maintain the bottle bill. And you have not.

I have spent the last 10 months trying to get legislators to understand the gravity of our situation. I have spent the last 10 months listening to stories of complete devastation unfolding in our industry. We have lost over 60 redemption centers in just the last year alone. With these closures comes a loss of tax paying businesses, significant job loss and a huge negative impact on our environment and communities.

We keep hearing politicians say, "well the stores can just handle it." They cannot. Nor do they want to. We have redemption centers processing over 100,000 containers a DAY. Redemption centers accept all returnable brands. While stores have a \$12 limit and only take brands they sell. This puts a significant burden on the consumer and many of my customers have told me they will simply stop recycling altogether if we close. Some areas have already seen an increase in litter due to closures.

We are crucial to this system, and without us the system fails. The DEC has told me this themselves. We have been pleading for help for years. I told many legislators in January that this year was going to be the breaking point if we didn't see action. And I am sorry to say that I was very much right about that. Our continued closures will have a severe ripple effect in communities all over New York. Creating more litter and taking away a vital financial resource that many rely on.

If the state truly believes in small business, job opportunities and what's best for the environment, you will take the necessary action to save our industry. We need an emergency increase on our handling fee and we needed it years ago. The state of Maine passed emergency legislation in May to address this exact issue. There is absolutely no reason that New York cannot do the same.