



NYS Budget Testimony 2026

The Crisis of the Bottle Bill and the Call for a Lifeline

For over forty years, the New York Bottle Bill has been a bedrock environmental success, a fact proven by **billions of containers diverted from landfills** and a **seventy percent reduction in roadside litter**. This essential success is physically delivered by a statewide network of **over six hundred locally-owned redemption centers** that employ thousands of New Yorkers.

Today, that foundational system is collapsing.

The law's economic structure is fatally outdated, having last been meaningfully revised in **2009**. At that time, the 3.5-cent handling fee and the 5-cent deposit were functional. In 2026, they represent an economic death sentence for small businesses.

Since 2009, general inflation has eroded the dollar's value by approximately one-third. A 3.5-cent fee must now be at least 5.5 cents just to retain its original purchasing power. The 5-cent deposit should be closer to 8 or even 10 cents to maintain its necessary incentive and the system's stability.

Yet, the reality is far more brutal than general inflation. The essential operating costs for redemption centers—labor, electricity, fuel, insurance, and equipment—have **doubled or even tripled**. Machines that once cost \$100,000 now approach \$300,000. Insurance premiums and commercial property rates have exploded.

We are frozen in time. Our compensation is fixed, our margins are nonexistent, and unlike every other participant in the beverage supply chain, we are small businesses prohibited from adjusting our pricing.

This is not a political issue; it is a mathematical certainty: **a system with fixed revenue and soaring costs is unsustainable.**

The results are catastrophic: **200 redemption centers have been forced to close since 2023**. This critical infrastructure is disappearing. Meanwhile, the State has accumulated an estimated **nearly \$2 billion in "kept" nickels** from unredeemed deposits since 2020. This is state-held money generated by the very system now being starved. An expanded Bottle Bill would not only modernize the system but also has the potential to **more than double these state funds**, channeling them back into environmental programs.

Therefore, if the state is not prepared to pass the expanded Bottle Bill immediately, it must pass the **Lifeline Bill**. The infrastructure necessary for any future expansion—the six hundred remaining



centers—will not survive the legislative timeline without immediate, structural correction. We cannot build a stronger system upon one that is financially hemorrhaging.

My recent appearance with bags of bottles in front of the Governor's residence was not an act of anger or disrespect. It was a civic act born of absolute necessity. When a community performing an essential public service is systemically ignored for years, **peaceful escalation becomes a patriotic duty.**

In American history, when legitimate voices are silenced, symbolic action is the language of urgency. The Boston Tea Party was not vandalism; it was a desperate statement that a system had become unlivable. Our action was a modern-day New York Bottle Bill Tea Party. Not out of malice, but out of necessity to be heard by ears that have been **deaf to our pleas.**

Other essential workers possess leverage: nurses can strike, transit workers can strike, and corporations deploy armies of lobbyists. Redemption centers have none of that. We cannot shut down public health, stop trains, or move markets.

All we have is you. Our elected representatives are the *only* people with the authority to fix this collapse. You are our single lifeline.

The Lifeline Bill and the expanded Bottle Bill are not *giveaways*; they are **structural corrections** to reflect economic reality. They are measures that will increase funding for the DEC and environmental programs while preserving the small-business backbone that delivers the state's recycling outcomes.

Governor Hochul supports small business. We *are* small business: all six hundred of us. Family-run operations, immigrant-owned businesses, multi-generation employers—we are the physical, working infrastructure of New York's circular economy.

Without immediate relief, many of us will not survive to see reform. Once this infrastructure is gone, the cost and difficulty of rebuilding it will be exponentially higher.

We are not asking for special treatment. We are demanding that **economic reality be acknowledged, the system be updated, and the people who make the Bottle Bill work every day be allowed to survive.**

Pass the Lifeline Bill.

Modernize the Bottle Bill.

Do not allow the system that has served New York for four decades to collapse on your watch.

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