

Testimony of Representative Frank I. Smizik
Before the Joint Committee on Energy
In Support of HB 3515
An Act to Improve Recycling Rates in the Commonwealth

October 7, 2009

What is the problem:

The original "Bottle Bill" was an important step in improving recycling rates in Massachusetts. By requiring all dealers to accept many forms of beverage containers, the recycling of bottles became extremely accessible. Recycling efforts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have led to a reduction in waste in our overcrowded landfills, a reduction in pollution in our waterways and drinking reservoirs, a reduction in the usage of our scarce fossil fuels, and the overall decrease in greenhouse gas emissions in the state by 15.4 % in 1996 alone.

While these improvements to our environment have been significant, we are not doing all that we can to utilize our recycling resources. Efforts should be increased to continue down this environmentally-friendly and economically effective path by increasing the types of containers we can recycle. Since the original bill's adoption, market trends have changed, with non-carbonated beverages such as teas, water and sports drinks now consuming much of the beverage market. The bottle bill needs to be updated to be inclusive of these non-traditional containers.

Statistical evidence demonstrates that the current law is no longer working as intended, largely because consumers have changed their 'on-the-go' beverage preferences to types not covered under the law. Today, fewer than 60 percent of containers sold are redeemable, and this percentage is expected to decline further. About three-quarters of non-deposit beverage containers wind up either as litter or trash, costing our cities and towns for their cleanup and disposal and creating unnecessary waste and pollution. Conversely, about three-quarters of redeemable containers are recycled, either through the deposit system or residential recycling programs. Furthermore, the Massachusetts recycling industry - which has grown around this law, is now struggling with reduced supply and increasing costs for redemption processing.

What this bill does:

House Bill 3515 would expand the definition of "beverage" to include non-carbonated water, sports drinks, teas and coffee products. Sales of such "new age" beverages have increased 150 percent since 1991. Because these drinks are not currently covered by the Bottle Bill, millions of these containers get unnecessarily sent to Massachusetts landfills

and incinerators each year, costing cities and towns money in costly disposal fees. These containers generate a significant amount of trash and can be put to better use if the Commonwealth passes this legislation.

The current Massachusetts Bottle Bill has produced an average rate of return at 77%. Maintaining all of the regulations provided in the current Bottle Bill legislation, this expanded version of the bill will be responsible for recycling almost 2 billion additional containers in Massachusetts each year by putting deposits on these additional single-serve drinks. Under this expansion, the DEP estimates over \$15 million in additional unclaimed deposit revenue could be generated.

Overall, this bill expands coverage, increases the redemption fee paid to recyclers, and re-establishes funds to the Clean Environment Fund while bringing in new revenue for the state.

Why this bill is important:

By extending the bottle bill to include the aforementioned containers in the rebate program, citizens will continue to be encouraged to recycle at a high rate, impacting positively on the state's environmental well-being. As former Chairman of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture, and current chairman of the House Committee on Global Warming and Climate Change, it is truly important to me that recycling is promoted, as it is a crucial practice which improves our environment and community.

In order to protect our State's environment, advance conservation and recycling in Massachusetts, aid our cities and towns in reducing litter and trash, and generate much needed revenue, I respectfully urge the Committee to report HB. 3515 favorably out of committee.