



Environment Council of Rhode Island

Testimony by Peter Trafton, Providence Rhode Island on behalf of the Environment Council of Rhode Island in Support of H-6207

Dear Chair Bennett and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

I write with the strongest support of H-6207 by Rep. McEntee and colleagues, the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper Act.

Narragansett Bay, at the center of Rhode Island, is a test case for why we must stop accepting the increasingly serious, gross pollution of beverage containers, most of them plastic. Way too many beverage bottles are found along our roads, paths, beaches, and other public spaces. They are a massive litter and waste problem that have not been reduced by admonishing one another to “pick up our litter”. They have not been decreased by our single-path approach to waste recycling.

URI studies have shown that the beverage bottles and other plastic waste break down and become micro-plastic bits that are carried downstream into the Bay where they collect on the bottom. Too many find their way into our food chain.

Our family loves fresh fish and shellfish. Our elder daughter teaches middle school science in Washington State, on the edge of Puget Sound. With a microscope, she shows her classes the plastic microparticles within their local oysters. You can bet those microparticles are in Rhode Island’s quahogs and oysters too.

We can stop Rhode Island’s plastic and other waste from floating into our Bay. The RI Joint Legislative Commission on Plastic Bottle Waste has studied the problem and concluded that a Deposit Return System (DRS) will be more than 90% successful at recycling beverage containers. Bill H-6207 provides this, together with an additional Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system for collection of packaging waste. Both systems would be self-funding and would remove materials presently going to our landfill. Both would be run by producer responsibility programs focused on convenience and efficiency. These are well described in the bill.

The Environment Council of Rhode Island believes that Rep. McEntee’s bill will improve our health by preventing microparticles plastic from entering our food chain, will reduce litter and waste, increase recycling, and decrease the cost of waste management for our municipalities. It is clear that a 10-cent deposit provides a necessary incentive. This works in Connecticut and Massachusetts is increasing their deposit to 10-cents as well. Customer satisfaction with programs like those described in H-6207, is evident in other states, and many other countries. A recent poll of Rhode Islanders by Save the Bay indicates that a 27-point margin – 58% to 31% - support a bottle bill like S-996. **H-6207 is one of ECRI’s four top priority bills for the current session.**

It is time for Rhode Island to stop hoping that ineffective measures will somehow take care of a problem that will be significantly improved with a newer and better, less expensive and more environmentally protective approach. The 10-cent deposit on each bottle is not a tax. It is returned in full in exchange for the empty bottle. Leaving 10-cents, temporarily, with the bottle recycling system, and receiving it back, in full for each bottle, is enough to make our bottle recycling system work. The beverage producers have offered no effective alternative. They are contributing to our mess. We must expect them to help us clean it up.

Please pass Rep. McEntee's Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper Act, H-6207, this year and help it move forward to clean up Rhode Island's environment.

Thanks very much for considering our comments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PG Trafton". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with the "P" and "G" being particularly prominent.

Peter Trafton,
Co-VP of Policy, Environmental Council of Rhode Island