



Mayor of Providence

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Brett P. Smiley

May 27, 2025

The Honorable David A. Bennett, Chair  
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Bennett and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I support House Bill 7911, *An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper Act*. If enacted, this legislation would establish a comprehensive statewide program for recycling beverage containers and extended producer responsibility for packaging and paper products.

Rhode Island needs responsible, common-sense policy that tangibly and immediately addresses our waste crisis. This bill represents a significant step towards modernizing waste and recycling systems in the state, improving recycling rates, reducing litter, preventing further plastic pollution in our ecosystems and waterways, and reducing municipal hauling and disposal costs. By requiring producers of packaging to help fund the recycling system, this legislation recognizes that municipalities cannot continue to bear the brunt of the growing financial and operational burden associated with managing plastic and packaging waste. By establishing a framework for producer responsibility for packaging and paper products, this bill would also encourage more sustainable and recyclable packaging design.

For Providence, the financial impact of the current system is substantial. Contaminated recycling loads currently cost Providence \$2 million per year in tipping fees. A modernized beverage container redemption program could save Providence more than \$615,000 per year in disposal costs. When trash is combined with the single stream curbside recycling materials, all of the materials become trash that takes up capacity at the central landfill and causes the City to exceed our trash tonnage cap. Diverting clean, recyclable materials through the deposit program will ensure that the materials are properly recycled, reduce the City's recycling and trash tonnage, and save taxpayer dollars.

In Providence and across the state, beverage containers and packaging waste litter our neighborhoods, parks, and waterways. Despite decades of statewide and local efforts to reduce litter and improve recycling and waste management in Rhode Island, plastic debris and litter continue to pollute our communities. In Providence, beverage containers are a major culprit clogging our storm drains, exacerbating the flooding impacts of the more intense storms caused by climate change. Save The Bay notes that beverage containers specifically are the most frequently collected item during coastal cleanups.

This legislation aligns with my Administration's broader investments in environmental resiliency. The City of Providence is spearheading a multi-pronged and holistic waste management effort, including

community composting opportunities and funding education and outreach for composting and recycling. Through a USDA compost grant, the City is supporting partner organizations in registering over 300 households for compost pickup and/or drop-off. Through an EPA SWIFR grant, the City's Departments of Sustainability and Public Works are working with a community partner organization, Zero Waste Providence, to conduct on-the-ground recycling education and outreach, targeting household-level contamination to increase recycling rates and decrease contaminated loads diverted to the landfill. Additionally, the City is in the process of rolling out new recycling and trash carts for Providence residents to improve recycling participation, reduce contamination and tipping fees, and help preserve the increasingly limited space at the landfill.

Municipalities cannot address the state's waste challenges alone. House Bill 7199 is needed to complement and strengthen local efforts. The bottle deposit policy proposed in this bill is a proven strategy that has been implemented successfully across the country. States with similar programs have less litter and substantially higher recycling rates, than states without them. As a state with a single landfill that is filling at a rapid rate, Rhode Island must pursue comprehensive, proven strategies to address our waste management challenges.

House Bill 7911 is needed to address the beverage container litter in Providence and across the state, the environmental impacts of micro and nanoplastics, the ongoing prioritization of sustainable waste management practices that the City has in progress, and the dramatic reduction in municipal waste hauling costs for Providence.

I thank the sponsor of this legislation and respectfully urge the committee to vote in favor of House Bill 7911.

Sincerely,

  
Brett P. Smiley  
Mayor