



*Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study and Provide  
Recommendations to Protect our Environment and Natural  
Resources from Plastic Bottle Waste*

**Final Report**

**April 8, 2025**

**Report Submitted to the  
Rhode Island House of Representatives and Rhode Island Senate**

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## Commission Members

- Representative Carol Hagan McEntee, Co-Chair, District 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett
- Senator Mark P. McKenney, Co-Chair, District 30, Warwick
- Minority Leader Michael Chippendale, District 40, Foster, Glocester, Coventry
- Representative Tina L. Spears, District 36, Charlestown, South Kingstown, New Shoreham, Westerly
- Senator Bridget Valverde, District 35, North Kingstown, East Greenwich, South Kingstown
- Senator Thomas J. Paolino, District 17, Lincoln, North Providence, North Smithfield
- Representative David A. Bennett, District 20, Warwick, Cranston
- Senator V. Susan Sosnowski, District 37, South Kingstown
- Jared Rhodes, Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation
- Robert Swartz, Rhode Island Alcohol Beverage Distributors
- Scott Bromberg, Rhode Island Food Dealers
- Jackie Mancini, National Beer Wholesalers
- Nicholas A. Fede, Jr., Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative
- Larry Coburn, Colbea Enterprises
- Terry Gray, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
- Margaret Hogan Sweeney, Rhode Island Beverage Association
- Jed Thorp, Save The Bay
- Kevin Budris, Just Zero
- Emily Howe, Clean Water Action
- Phoenix Wheeler, Audubon Society of Rhode Island

*(Commission would like to thank former members Amy Moses, RI Audubon Society, Topher Hamblett, Save The Bay, and Tom Papa, RI Beverage Association)*



## **A Letter from Co-Chairs Representative Carol Hagan McEntee and Senator Mark P. McKenney**

Dear Speaker Shekarchi and President Ruggerio,

We are pleased to provide you with the findings and recommendations of the Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study and Provide Recommendations to Protect our Environment and Natural Resources from Plastic Bottle Waste (the “**Commission**”).

This twenty (20) member Commission included dedicated professionals from various fields, including environmental organizations, Narragansett Bay advocates, and food and beverage industries.

Pursuant to its enabling legislation, 2023--H 5502 Sub A and 2023—S 0671 Sub A, and subsequent extension and modifications 2024—H8354, the Commission was convened to make a comprehensive study on the issues with current practices for recycling of plastic bottles, glass, aluminum, miniature alcoholic beverage containers (nips), and single-use plastic packaging.

Accordingly, the Commission heard related testimony, and studied written testimony, from the following sources that provided various perspectives regarding the aforementioned issues: the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC), Clean Water Action, the New England Convenience Store and Energy Marketers Association (NECSEMA), the Container Recycling Institute (CRI), the American Beverage Association, the Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative (RILOC), the Sazerac Company, Mancini Beverage, Horizon Beverage, an Oregon Bottle Bill advocate, Public Testimony, CLYNK, Legal Counsel for The Rhode Island House of Representatives, University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography, Can Manufactures Institute (CMI), Association of Plastic Recyclers (APR), Glass Packaging Institute (GPI), Breezeway Consulting, The Recycling Partnership, and the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI).

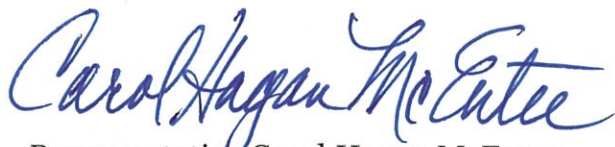
This final report is a culmination of thirteen (13) hearings that began in September, 2023 and ended in March, 2025. It contains information presented by various witnesses who testified before the Commission, as well as presentations made, which the Commission has studied.

It is clear to us as Co-Chairs that the recycling system in Rhode Island is not working well enough. Too much recyclable packaging is ending up in the landfill, as well as in our streets and waterways. Anti-litter initiatives, such as the Litter-Free Rhode Island program promoted by Governor and Mrs. McKee, are certainly worthwhile, and would be enhanced by the recommendations being made by this Commission. No evidence was presented, however, to show that anti-litter programs have any appreciable effect on recycling rates.

There are three recommendations in this report, each of which would help address these pressing issues, in different ways.

We would like to express our gratitude to all members of the Commission for their willingness to take part in this worthy initiative and we appreciate the investment of the time and talent that they graciously provided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carol Hagan McEntee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carol" being the most prominent.

Representative Carol Hagan McEntee  
Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark P. McKenney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" being the most prominent.

Senator Mark P. McKenney  
Co-Chair



## Commission Findings

*The following findings are based on topics that were raised or discussed during Commission meetings:*

Of the six New England states, Rhode Island and New Hampshire do not have a bottle bill.

Most New England states have had bottle deposit laws including Vermont (1972); Connecticut (1978); Maine (1976); and Massachusetts (1981). Numerous states and countries have bottle deposit laws—including many adopted in recent years—providing many examples of bottle deposit systems with varying degrees of effectiveness. According to a 2023 report from Eunomia, of the ten states with the highest recycling rates in the country, nine have bottle deposit laws (Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, Iowa, Oregon, New York, California, Michigan, and Connecticut).

Rhode Island Resource Recovery (RIRRC) expects the Central Landfill to reach capacity in 2046 under current disposal rates, with many contaminated loads getting buried in the landfill due to people putting ineligible materials into their recycling carts or preparing those materials incorrectly.

Curbside recycling, by itself, has not been as effective in achieving recycling rates similar to those in states with Deposit Return Systems (DRS) for beverage containers. According to Eunomia's December 2023 "The 50 States of Recycling" report, 9 of the top 10 are states with DRS. Rhode Island is ranked 26<sup>th</sup> in this State-By-State overview of packaging recycling rates excluding fiber and flexible plastics (FFP). Despite the best efforts of Rhode Islanders, we still bury thousands of tons of recyclable beverage containers in the landfill each year.

Best practice deposit returns in Maine, Michigan and Oregon have raised single-use drinks containers return rates to over 80%, per the RELOOP 2024 Global Deposit Book Report.

Save The Bay's 2023 RI Coastal Cleanup Report collected 22,480 pounds of trash from Rhode Island shorelines, including 43,858 drinking items (plastic bottles, glass bottles, cans, caps, straws, and stirrers).

The 2023 study from researchers at the University of Rhode Island (Victoria M. Fulfer & J. P. Walsh) found there is now roughly 1,000 tons of microplastic (over 16 trillion pieces) in the bottom sediment of Narragansett Bay. Microplastics end up being ingested by marine species and eventually by humans.

The Keep America Beautiful 2020 National Litter Study compares litter in regions of the United States with bottle deposit legislation and areas without such legislation. The Study estimates there was substantially more deposit-material litter per capita in non-bottle bill states than in bottle bill states, by a difference of a two-to-one ratio.

Testimony provided from the Can Manufacturers Institute, Association of Plastic Recyclers, and Glass Packaging Institute stated manufacturers need more, high quality recycled



material to make new containers to feed existing domestic manufacturing demand since recycling rates have essentially stagnated.

The evidence showed that all bottle bill laws are not created equal: a Deposit Return System (DRS) can be mediocre or excellent. Maine and Oregon have exemplary systems. These successful programs rest on the pillars of incentive & convenience; when it's as easy to recycle as to toss an item, the system works.

Per RELOOP, the global market for Deposit Return Systems (DRS) is experiencing significant growth, with a growing number of countries implementing DRS leading to increased collection rates and improved recycling. As of January 2025, over 350 million people globally live in jurisdictions with DRS for the collection and recycling of single-use beverage containers. European countries with DRS have the highest rate of success, with beverage container return rates over 90%.

Testimony was provided with respect to these two essential ingredients for a successful DRS: incentive and convenience. With respect to incentive, a meaningful deposit, in 2025, is at least 10 cents per beverage container – states with 5 cent deposits are increasing the amount, as it has not proved sufficient to prompt consumers to recycle.

As to convenience, Rhode Islanders need multiple pathways for returning containers. These would potentially include bag drops, return to retail, reverse vending machines, and other easy return locations.

Legitimate concerns were expressed by the liquor, beverage, and retail industries regarding a bottle bill. These include managing of empty containers, handling fees, impact on cross-border competitiveness (including differences in beverage tax structures in MA/CT), cross state fraud, and overall cost and efficiency of operating the system. Concerns were also raised regarding how higher prices resulting from a bottle bill might adversely impact the end consumer.

Retail stores do not support being obligated to handle recycled materials in store or be responsible for reverse vending machines on property. Testimony included concerns as to the impact on cleanliness of their locations, which specialize in offering fresh food and produce. The machines produce rodents and bugs and a not so pleasant odor. They noted that additional staffing might be necessary for an undesirable position in a climate where it is difficult to hire and maintain staff. They stated that it is difficult for small and medium size locations to create space for reverse vending. Also, commercial parking lots are zoned based on the number of spots per sq. ft of retail space, so that will have to be accounted for.

In addition, if bottles are not labeled properly, they can't be redeemed. Out of state bottles and cans that can't be redeemed are sometimes left at these locations, with no provision for storage and disposal.

It was pointed out that the increased cost at the register will result in increased credit card fees. Also, can collectors could potentially create issues at retail in a reverse vending machine setting - clogging lines with people who don't shop in that location. They might



bring car/truckloads of cans, and create a delay for the regular shoppers looking to claim their deposits.

It was noted that funds raised from uncollected deposits might not be kept in the program, but diverted to the general fund (as has occurred with anti-litter funds). In that regard, it was argued that basic anti-litter initiatives could be better enforced in RI.

Testimony indicated that any changes must consider the roles of the Rhode Island Resource Recovery and the Department of Environmental Management. The state's recycling infrastructure would have to be updated to support any new initiative.

Implementation of a recycling refund program in Rhode Island will have a cost, and that cost will vary depending on how the program is designed. There has been no new DRS implemented in the US in over 20 years; the effort and investment required to accomplish this would be significant.

With respect to the concerns raised by the liquor, beverage and retail industries, it was noted that much has changed with respect to the handling of used beverage containers; many of the complaints related to "old-style" bottle bills, rather than 21st century DRS. Model programs handle containers in a far cleaner, more efficient and convenient manner. Users have a "credit card", on which refunds are quickly reflected. The evidence showed that, as a measure of the quality and convenience of the system, consumers in places such as Oregon give their DRS program an approval rating of over 90%.

Since the first DRS systems were created, many improvements have been made, providing tested illustrations of best practices. A major example is the cost issue, which has been addressed (as demonstrated in both American and European models), by the industry itself stepping forward to shoulder responsibility.

An Oregon-style system would be run by a nonprofit Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) where all costs for implementing and operating the system are borne by the PRO. State costs, even for oversight, would be covered.

The evidence presented to the Commission reflected that, in addition to a DRS, an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program could substantially impact the problem of plastic waste. A well-designed EPR program builds on existing state, local, and private sector recycling investments; expands service and materials recycled to cover all residential packaging and paper; and shifts municipal recycling costs to the private sector - those responsible for putting this packaging into commerce. Testimony indicated, though, that EPR for packaging, without a DRS, would not have any appreciable benefit in terms of litter reduction.

Model DRS, EPR, and combined DRS/EPR legislation has been proposed to the Co-Chairs of the Commission for legislative consideration.

For both DRS and EPR, the PRO is the linchpin. It is a privately managed, nonprofit organization made up of the consumer brands who put the material on the market. Those



companies are held responsible for operating and funding the entire recycling system from education to collection to optimize consumer education, access, collection, processing and more.

## Commission Recommendations

**1. Recommend that the General Assembly consider combining both a Deposit Return System (DRS) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program to produce a system that both addresses litter and improves recycling that:**

- Includes all beverage and recyclable container types
- Establishes a 10-cent redemption value
- Does not require retailers to take back empty containers
- Establishes an Advisory Board that includes representation from at least two Rhode Island State Agencies
- Requires establishment of a nonprofit Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO)
- Establishes an education and outreach program to improve recycling
- Includes a thoughtful timeline for the development and implementation of the system

**2. Recommend that the General Assembly consider creating a Deposit Return System (DRS) that:**

- Is a “producer run” and funded system (like in Oregon)
- Includes all beverage and recyclable container types
- Establishes a 10-cent redemption value
- Establishes clear and enforceable redemption targets, with the eventual target of at least 85%
- Utilizes technology to create network of return options that are convenient and easy for consumers to use (with a nod towards things like bag drop programs, return depots, reverse vending machines)
- Aims to lessen the burden on retailers by not requiring retailers to take back empty containers.
- Requires that any unclaimed deposits must be used by the Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) to help run and improve the system
- Allows Rhode Island Resource Recovery (RIRRC) and other material recovery facilities (MRF) to get a percentage of the deposit value from containers collected via single-stream recycling
- Includes strong oversight (from an advisory committee), accountability, transparency, and reporting

**3. Recommend that the General Assembly consider creating an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program for Statewide Recycling of Packaging and Paper that includes:**

- Establishes an Advisory Board that includes representation from at least two Rhode Island State Agencies



- Requires establishment of a nonprofit Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO)
- Requires the PRO to prepare a five-year program plan that describes how producers will be informed of their obligations under the program including reporting and payment of dues, how the program will utilize responsible end markets for collected material, proposed collection and recycling targets in aggregate and for covered material categories.
- Establishes criteria for an education and outreach program to improve recycling and composting

## **Appendix A-Comments from Commission Members**

- The Rhode Island Beverage Association (Margaret Hogan Sweeney) did not support Commission Recommendations 1 and 2, see letter dated March 14, 2025 in Commission Documents in Appendix C.
- Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative (Nicholas Fede Jr.), Rhode Island Food Dealers (Scott Bromberg), Colbea Enterprises (Larry Coburn), National Beer Wholesalers (Jackie Mancini), and the Rhode Island Alcohol Beverage Distributors (Robert Swartz), did not support any of the three Commission Recommendations. See letter dated March 14, 2025 in Commission Documents in Appendix C.
- Save The Bay (Jed Thorp), Clean Water Action (Emily Howe), Audubon Society of RI (Phoenix Wheeler), and Just Zero (Kevin Budris) did not support Commission Recommendation 3, see letter dated March 20, 2025 in Commission Documents in Appendix C.
- Combined Statement from Commissioners Nick Fede Jr., Jackie Mancini, and Robert Swartz in Response to Draft Report, see letter dated March 21, 2025 in Commission Documents in Appendix C.



## **Appendix B-Meeting Agendas**

*These documents have been posted in the Plastic Bottle Waste Commission section of the Joint Commissions tab of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website:*

<https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/pages/commissions.aspx>

### ***1. September 27, 2023 Agenda***

- Election of Co-Chairs
- Review of Enabling Legislation 2023 H--5502 Sub A and 2023--S0671 Sub A

### ***2. October 23, 2023 Agenda***

- Terrence Gray, RI Department of Environmental Management
- Jared Rhodes, RI Resource Recovery/Dave McLaughlin, RI Department of Environmental Management

### ***3. November 06, 2023 Agenda***

- Susan Chiariello, Esq., Legislative Council
- Jed Thorp, Clean Water Action
- Peter Brennan, New England Convenience Store and Energy Marketers Association (NECSEMA)

### ***4. December 18, 2023 Agenda***

- Megan Daum, American Beverage Association
- Susan Collins, Container Recycling Institute

### ***5. January 22, 2024 Agenda***

- Nicholas A. Fede, Jr.-Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative
- Kellie Duhr - Sazerac, Co.
- Robert Swartz, Michael Epstein-Horizon Beverage; Jackie Mancini-Mancini Beverage

### ***6. March 11, 2024 Agenda***

- Jules Bailey, "Oregon's experience with a bottle bill: setup and results"

### ***7. April 1, 2024 Agenda***

- Public Testimony

### ***8. April 29, 2024 Agenda***

- Bridget O'Brien, Chief Operating Officer, CLYNK
- Discussion of proposed findings and recommendations

### ***9. May 13, 2024 Agenda***

- Discussion of Draft Final Report

***10. December 9, 2024 Agenda***

- J.P. Walsh, URI Graduate School of Oceanography
- Scott Breen, Sr. Vice President of Sustainability, Can Manufactures Institute
- Steve Alexander, CEO/President, Association of Plastic Recyclers
- Scott DeFife, President, Glass Packaging Institute

***11. January 13, 2025 Agenda***

- Bree Dietly, Principal, Breezeway Consulting
- Dylan de Thomas, Vice President of Public Policy & Government Affairs, The Recycling Partnership

***12. January 27, 2025 Agenda***

- Scott Cassel, CEO, Product Stewardship Institute
- Commission Discussion

***13. March 10, 2025 Agenda***

- Discussion of Commission Findings



## **Appendix C-Enabling Legislation, Written Testimony, Material, and Presentations**

*These documents have been posted in the Plastic Bottle Waste Commission section of the Joint Commissions tab of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website:*

<https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/pages/commissions.aspx>

04-08-2025---Final Report

03-21-2025---Combined Statement from Commissioners Nick Fede Jr., Jackie Mancini, and Robert Swartz in response to Draft Report

03-20-2025---Save The Bay, Clean Water Action, Audubon Society RI, and Just Zero letter to Commission in response to Draft Report

03-14-2025---Rhode Island Liquor Operators Collaborative, Rhode Island Food Dealers, Colbea Enterprises, National Beer Wholesalers, and the Rhode Island Alcohol Beverage Distributors letter to Commission in response to Draft Report

03-14-2025---Rhode Island Beverage Association letter in response to Draft Report

03-07-2025---Could RI get a bottle bill ProJo Article

02-27-2025---Bottle Bill Poll Summary Slides Save The Bay

02-27-2025---Bottle Bill Poll Summary Memo Save The Bay

03-10-2025---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste

01-27-2025---Scott Cassel Product Stewardship Institute

01-27-2025---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste

01-13-2025---TRP RI Dylan deThomas

01-13-2025---Bree Dietly Breezeway presentation PDF

01-13-2025---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste

12-09-2024---Maya Etheridge Plastic Waste Commission Recycling in our schools' letter

12-09-2024---RI Commission Presentation from APR CMI and GPI

12-09-2024---JP Walsh URI presentation RI State House

12-09-2024---Agenda Bottle Bill Commission

06-26-2024---H8354 Commission Extension

05-13-2024---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste

05-09-2024---CLYNK Sustainability Stations

05-08-2024---Maine Bottle Bill Information

04-29-2024---CLYNK Bridget O'Brien COO Presentation

04-29-2024---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste

04-26-2024---Advocates say R.I. 'bottle bill' would make a real difference - The Boston Globe

04-01-2024---Sula Prentiss-Garg Ripples of Change

04-01-2024---Craig Penardo Main Street Wine & Spirits

04-01-2024---Roberta Houlihan

04-01-2024---Willow Campbell Ripples of Change

04-01-2024---Renu Englehart

04-01-2024---Anaïs Chipel

04-01-2024---Peter Trafton  
 04-01-2024---Kate Sayles RI Land Trust Council  
 04-01-2024---Barry Schiller  
 04-01-2024---Dr. Hans Scholl  
 04-01-2024---Jay Taranto  
 04-01-2024---Abigail Goblick  
 04-01-2024---Eugenia Marks  
 04-01-2024---Emma Pautz  
 04-01-2024---Mary Lou Nicholson Be the Solution to Pollution  
 04-01-2024---Erin Ritter Conservation Law Foundation  
 04-01-2024---Robert S. Smith, M.D.  
 04-01-2024---Barbara Walsh  
 04-01-2024---Craig O'Connor  
 04-01-2024---Debbie Schimberg  
 04-01-2024---Sheila Smith  
 04-01-2024---Joan Wertheimer  
 04-01-2024---Susan Kelley  
 04-01-2024---Jeanine Silversmith  
 04-01-2024---Charlotte Roberts  
 04-01-2024---John Leventhal Public Testimony  
 04-01-2024---Anna Browder Public Testimony  
 04-01-2024---David Flanders Public Testimony  
 04-01-2024---Greg Gerritt Public Testimony  
 04-01-2024---Stephanie Santos Lincoln Conservation Commission Public Testimony  
 04-01-2024---Benjamin Peters Salt Pond Coalition Public Testimony  
 04-01-2024---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste  
 03-14-2024---Bottle recycling in Oregon provides example for RI Alex Kuffner ProJo  
 03-11-2024---RI presentation Jules Bailey  
 03-11-2024---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste  
 01-22-2024---Maryland 2023 SB 222 Senate Third Reading 050823  
 01-22-2024---Maryland 2023 SB 222 Senate Third Reading 031623  
 01-22-2024---Kellie Duhr comments Sazerac Rhode Island January 22 Testimony FINAL  
 01-22-2024---Beverage Container Deposit Legislation Retail Compliance Center July 2023  
 01-30-2024---URI BOTTLE BILL PETITION  
 01-30-2024---URI Petition Picture  
 01-30-2024---URI Students Display Hundreds of Plastic Bottles on Quad to Support Bottle Bill -  
 ecoRI News 12-8-2023  
 01-23-2024---Connecticut receives \$8.9M from nickel-per-nip program WTNH  
 Harfmann11232023  
 01-22-2024---Bottle Bill Presentation Wholesalers  
 01-22-2024---Kellie Duhr Sazerac presentation  
 01-22-2024---Nick Fede RILOC PRESENTATION - PLASTICS - 1\_22\_24  
 01-22-2024---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste  
 12-18-2023---Colorado PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAM House Bill 22 1355  
 12-18-2023---Megan Daum Testimony Final Rhode Island Plastic Bottle Waste Commission  
 12-18-2023---Megan Daum Rhode Island Plastic Bottle Waste Commission December 2023  
 12-18-2023---Susan Collins Rhode Island PDF



12-18-2023---Redemption Rates and Other Features of 10 US State Deposit Programs Susan Collins  
09-28-2023---Transcripts of Senate Committee Testimony Collins Bailey Alexander  
09-28-2023---Susan Collins Testimony to Senate Committee  
09-28-2023---Jules Bailey Testimony to Senate Committee  
09-28-2023---Steve Alexander Testimony to Senate Committee  
12-18-2023---50 STATES of Recycling Eunomia Report December 2023  
12-18-2023---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste Commission  
11-06-2023---Extensive estuarine sedimentary storage of plastics Narragansett Bay by Victoria M. Fulfer and J.P. Walsh 2023  
11-06-2023---Susan Chiariello Presentation PDF  
11-06-2023---RELOOP Overview of Deposit Systems  
11-06-2023---Peter Brennan NECSEMA Presentation PDF  
11-06-2023---Jed Thorp Presentation PDF  
11-06-2023---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste Commission  
10-23-2023---DEM Dave McLaughlin notes  
10-23-2023---DEM Dave McLaughlin presentation  
10-23-2023---Jared Rhodes - Bottle Bill Study Commission revised  
10-23-2023---Terry Gray presentation-plastic-bottle-commission  
10-23-2023---Agenda Plastic Bottle Waste Commission  
10-17-2023---RI Task Force to Tackle Plastics Feb 19 2019 Report  
09-27-2023---DEM RIRRC January 10 2023 Summary of Plastics, Glass, Fibers, and Metals Recycling Requirements  
09-27-2023---Plastic Bottle Waste Commission Agenda  
06-26-2023---2023 S--0671 Sub A  
06-23-2023---2023 H--5502 Sub A

