

February 14, 2019

Representative Amy Sheldon,
Chair House Committee on
Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife

Dear Chairwoman Sheldon,

The Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD) would like to offer some information and express our concern with the proposed expansion of the container deposit law in bills H.63 and S.60. The bottle bill system and what we call “blue-bin recycling” are two completely separate systems in Vermont. Bottle bill materials collected at grocery stores and redemption centers are not brought to the state’s Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs) for processing. The bottle bill system materials are sorted and marketed out of state by private vendors. Vermont’s “blue-bin” recycling system doesn’t receive any benefit from redeemed bottle bill materials. This has become a serious, and expensive, problem and the proposed expansion of the bottle bill will make the problem worse.

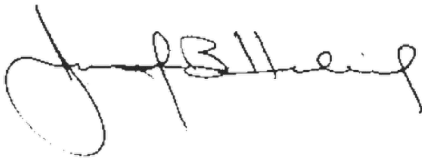
CSWD owns one of the two single stream MRFs in Vermont. Our MRF, located in Williston, processes approximately 55% of the blue-bin recyclables generated by Vermonters (blue-bin materials are: containers—plastic, metal, and glass bottles, cans, and jugs—paper, and cardboard). We rely on revenue from the sale of sorted recyclables and from MRF tipping fees (the fee charged to haulers to literally tip recyclables on the MRF floor) to pay our MRF operations contract and to reinvest back into the facility and support education. ***Expansion of the bottle bill to include plastic water bottles and other non-carbonated beverages would push the majority of valuable recycled household containers into the out-sourced processing system, by-passing Vermont’s recycling facilities. Instead of the revenue being invested in the recycling infrastructure in Vermont, it will be lost to profit an out-of-state company.***

The loss of aluminum and plastic beverage containers from the blue-bin system will result in making recycling in Vermont more expensive at a time when it is already economically challenging. Markets for paper, the largest amount of material produced by MRFs, have crashed. Consumers and haulers are paying historically high prices to recycle because of global commodity market constriction. Tip fees at the MRFs in Vermont are at an all-time high resulting in prices for recycling exceeding prices for trash disposal in some regions. Removing materials like plastic water bottles and aluminum will mean that the MRFs will have to raise their tip fees higher, further increasing recycling costs for residents and businesses.

Municipalities all over the world are scrambling to find ways to keep their programs going, and some are pulling the plug on their recycling programs all together. CSWD takes pride in providing critical infrastructure to support the state's mandate to keep recyclables out of the landfill. But recycling isn't free. It's a delicate balance between tip fees and commodity sales that is keeping the MRF financially viable without a massive taxpayer subsidy. **Pulling plastics and aluminum out of the MRF could tip the balance.**

We understand the need to fund clean water initiatives. We also know how expensive it is to keep recycling infrastructure in place and up to date. We think there's a way to do both, and we'd love to talk with you about our ideas. I will follow up to schedule a meeting with you in the next few weeks. In the meantime, it would be appreciated if you shared this letter with your committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jen Holliday". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "H".

Jen Holliday

Director of Public Policy & Diversion Facilities