



Dear Senator,

May 21st, 2026

We write to urge your support for H.915, legislation to make modest but important improvements to Vermont's Bottle Bill program.

Since the Bottle Bill was passed 54 years ago, it's been the state's most popular and successful recycling program. In fact, about 10 billion cans and bottles have been redeemed and recycled through the program.

But while the law works well in many ways, some aspects are definitely in need of an update. For instance, **the people who operate the state's bottle redemption centers have not been given an increase in their basic income - the beverage container handling fee - in 17 years.** Many have gone out of business and others are struggling to hang on.

The Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee recently gave unanimous support to H.915 in part because it includes a modest and temporary one-cent increase in the handling fee. After 2030, the redemption centers would negotiate with a new entity created under the law - a Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) - for fair compensation.

Since the handling fee was last increased, the Vermont minimum wage has almost doubled, from \$7.68 per hour to \$14.42 per hour (an 88% increase). As you well know, other expenses including utilities, rent, and insurance have also increased substantially.

It is not fair to expect redemption centers and retailers who take back containers to provide the same service for nearly 20 years without a single raise. Not even a penny.

The American Beverage Association is now running a campaign in Vermont to try to kill this bill simply because it provides a temporary one-cent increase in the handling fee. According to the Secretary of State's office, the American Beverage Association (based in San Rafael, CA) reported an expenditure of nearly \$76,000 for digital ads, phones, website, and consulting fees on May 12, 2026.

The two leading members of the ABA, Coke and Pepsi, had a combined net income of \$22.2 billion in 2025. The salaries of their CEOs have about doubled since legislators last increased the handling fee, to approximately \$31 million and \$24 million, respectively.

The fact is that redemption centers are the backbone of the Bottle Bill program. As more of them go out of business because their numbers just don't add up, it will be more and more difficult for consumers to redeem their containers. If there is no place to conveniently redeem containers, the deposit may be felt as a tax.

Beyond the handling fee, there has been broad agreement among stakeholders around many other elements of the legislation. As an example, **H.915 takes steps to improve the efficiency of the redemption process - eliminating the time-consuming sorting by brand and introducing faster bulk redemption technology for larger centers.**

The PRO will be in charge of negotiating with redemption centers interested in receiving the new technology. The infrastructure investments will be paid for over a four-year period from 2030-2034. The money will be derived from a portion of the unclaimed deposits (via the Clean Water Fund, where all unclaimed deposit monies now go).

The bill is also designed to make it easier for consumers to find convenient places to redeem containers. For instance, **it will require at least three high-functioning redemption centers per county and at least one for every community of 7,000 people or more. There are minimum standards the centers must meet as well.**

Finally, the bill would **exempt small “Mom and Pop” retailers** (smaller than 5,000 sq. feet) from having to provide redemption services. This removes what has been a potential burden on small retailers across the state.

This legislation includes benefits for virtually all stakeholders. It is a product of much compromise. It gives beverage manufacturers and distributors more control of the program through the PRO while exempting small retailers. It gives consumers improved opportunities for redemption while finally providing a financial lifeline to redemption centers.

We urge you to vote YES on H.915 because it strikes a reasonable balance between competing interests and provides important benefits to consumers, small businesses, and our environment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Burns
Vermont Public Interest Research Group

Lauren Hierl
Vermont Natural Resource Council

Dan Fingas
Vermont Conservation Voters

