



ENVIRONMENT THE CITY

## WNY Groups Call for a “Bigger Better Bottle Bill”



by [John Szalasny](#) November 6, 2021, 8:53 am 16 Comments





Niagara Square was the kickoff for a state-wide event to call for a “Bigger Better Bottle Bill.” A group of environmental and social justice organizations was brought together Friday by the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), calling on Governor Kathy Hochul to modernize the 40 year old Returnable Container Act (commonly known as the Bottle Bill) and include it as part of her 2022-2023 executive budget.

NYPIRG spokesperson Ryan Carson laid out the changes that the coalition was asking for to the Bottle Bill. First, expand the types and number of beverage containers covered by the Bottle Bill. Second, to raise the deposit to a dime.

Since 1982, the only major change in the New York Bottle Bill was in 2009, when deposits were added to water bottles. Many new beverage types came to market since 1982 that are currently exempt from the five cent deposit including sports drinks, bottled teas and coffees. Also, the original bill exempted non-carbonated beverages like non-100% juice drinks. Expanding the types of beverages would also bring deposits to non-carbonated alcohol beverages, such as wine, ciders, mead and liquor.

A common refrain of the speakers at Niagara Square is that the value of a nickel is not what it used to be. That can be seen in the steadily declining redemption rates, from a high of 80% in 1985 to the current rate of 64%. The call to raise the deposit is consistent with the recommendations of the Container Recycling Institute (CRI). Their studies show that a higher deposit equates to a higher return rate.

The CRI can also point to the experience of the State of Oregon to show the impact of raising the deposit amount. Their first in the nation Bottle Bill was enacted in 1971 and like in New York, their return rate has steadily fallen to 64% in 2016. In 2017, the deposit was raised to ten cents and by 2020, their return rate was at 90%.

**“ The call was for an expansion of beverage types included in the deposit program and to raise the deposit to partially account for 40 years of inflation. ”**

Earlier this year, a bill similar to NYPIRG’s proposals to modernize the New York Bottle Bill was passed with bi-partisan support in

Connecticut. In addition, the states bordering the Empire State are acting on their own proposals. There are calls in Massachusetts to upgrade their Bottle Bill, legislation introduced to expand the Bottle Bill in Vermont, and a proposal to start a deposit program in Pennsylvania was recently introduced in the State House.

The push to modernize the New York Bottle Bill is not new. Several proposals have been suggested in the past, most recently by Governor Cuomo in his 2019 State of the State address. There was also concurrent legislation that was proposed in the 2019 and 2020 legislative sessions that would have expanded the items included in the Bottle Bill. At that time, it was vigorously opposed by the American Beverage Association (ABA), a group financed by companies like Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

But within the past two years, these and many other companies have made commitments to recycled content for their packaging and the ABA now has an initiative to Get Every Bottle Back. There is no better way to return recyclable material to a closed loop, bottle to bottle system than a single stream collection system like the one we have with our Bottle Bill. Returned containers are a dream source for recyclers. It is a clean source of material as the containers are already presorted into glass, aluminum and plastic, which reduces handling costs and makes the recycled content (especially for plastic) more cost competitive with new virgin materials.

When an expansion of the Bottle Bill was proposed three years ago, Governor Cuomo noted that it would “help to minimize litter, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect the environment for future generations.” The Bottle Bill has been recognized as the most successful program we have in combatting roadside waste. It’s time to modernize the law for the products and economics of the 2020s.

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Written by **John Szalasny**

John Szalasny is someone who cares about our planet. Born too late to join in on the first wave of organized environmental action in the 60’s, I’m making up for lost time as I get nearer to retirement on various environmental concerns including the plastic waste crisis. Check out my Facebook group Bring NYC’s Styrofoam Ban to My Hometown!  
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