



Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
% Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

March 29, 2023

RE: LD 972, Resolve, Directing the Department of Environmental Protection to Evaluate Strategies for Improving the Returnable Beverage Container Laws

Dear Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 972, Resolve, Directing the Department of Environmental Protection to Evaluate Strategies for Improving the Returnable Beverage Container Laws, on behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members and supporters.

Maine Audubon is proud to have stood amongst the many advocates for Maine's original "Bottle Bill" over 40 years ago. In 1976, our then assistant director Bill Ginn logged over 7,000 miles driving around the state, speaking to up to five audiences a day on behalf of the measure. In the end, the referendum passed comfortably, 58 percent to 42 percent. When the law's opponents forced yet another referendum two years later, 84 percent of voters chose to keep it in place.

By all measures, Maine's returnable beverage container laws have been a success. Research has consistently shown that bottle redemption laws are highly successful in reducing litter. A study in Maine after the law went into effect found that beverage container litter dropped 69 to 77 percent. In general, states with redemption laws have been found to experience a 75 to 80 percent return rate on redeemable containers - meaning the vast majority of beverage containers going out are making their way back after use. In addition to its environmental benefits, Maine's bottle bill supports small businesses, like redemption centers. It reduces the costs to communities of collecting and recycling these containers and it supports local fundraising efforts through bottle bills.

Given the passage of time, however, Maine Audubon believes that there is room for improvement. LD 972 directs the Department of Environmental Protection to convene a stakeholder group to develop recommendations to "update" Maine's laws governing the recycling of returnable beverage containers. This group will consider the fact that the number of

brands of beverages in returnable containers that require individual sorting has increased exponentially, increasing the labor necessary for handling containers; that rent, utilities, and labor costs for redemption centers have risen; and that there have been technology advances since the 1970s, and more.

The redemption rate in Maine ranges from 67 to 85 percent, depending on the type of container and initiator of deposit. Michigan, for example, has a ten cent deposit on cans experiences close to a 95 percent return rate (Maine's is five cents). There is room for improvement. We encourage the Committee to support this bill and look forward to learning about the outcome of the stakeholder group.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eliza Donoghue".

Eliza Donoghue, Esq.  
Director of Advocacy