

The New Jersey Plastics Advisory Council to Hold Public Meeting Evaluating the Need and Effectiveness of a Bottle Redemption Program

Bottle redemption programs, sometimes referred to and implemented through “Bottle Bills”, have been used in other states to increase recycling rates and reduce litter, but there is debate whether this kind of program is necessary or feasible in New Jersey

On March 26th, 2024, the Plastics Advisory Council (PAC), with assistance from the Department of Environmental Protection, will conduct a public meeting consisting of an expert panel discussion and comment period to seek input on whether a Bottle Redemption Program should be reconsidered in New Jersey. These programs have two core purposes: to reduce litter and to increase beverage container recycling.

The New Jersey legislature debated a potential Bottle Bill in the mid-1980s but opted instead for a broader program to address litter abatement and recycling. The Clean Communities Act passed in 1986 provides a funding source for a statewide litter abatement program, and the Mandatory Source Separation and Recycling Act passed in 1987 requires recycling throughout New Jersey. Ten states have passed Bottle Bills and provide 5-cent or 10-cent deposits back to consumers and many believe that such programs improve recycling rates. The Container Recycling Institute has found that beverage container recycling rates are more than double compared to most non-deposit states.

Cindy Zipf, Chair of the NJ PAC, stated, “Given this unique 40-year history and desire to compare New Jersey’s recycling system to that of bottle bill states, the PAC found it timely and consistent with our legislative mandate to seek input from field experts and the public on this matter.”

DEP representative to the PAC, Janine MacGregor, stated that “the PAC and the DEP are aware of renewed interest in this topic from some stakeholders and lawmakers and this is the reason the PAC believes it prudent to study these issues, assess other state programs and associated cost impacts for consumers, and consider whether there is a bottle redemption framework that would work for New Jersey”.

The PAC will hold a single, full day virtual public meeting conducted from 9:15 AM – 5:00 PM on March 26th. It will occur as a panel format with five specific topics of discussion:

- Panel #1: Baseline metrics, status of container recycling rates in New Jersey and Bottle Bill States;
- Panel #2: Economic implications of a potential bottle redemption program, pros and cons;
- Panel #3: Environmental considerations;
- Panel #4: Business perspectives on the bottle redemption question;
- Panel #5: Government perspectives on the bottle redemption question.

Expert witnesses have been invited to give short, 5-minute opening statements to offer their perspective on a bottle redemption program in each of the five panels. A 30-minute facilitated panel discussion will follow with questions forwarded to panelists ahead of time to encourage meaningful discussion. For each panel, ten minutes were left for questions and answers from PAC members only.

At the conclusion of all expert panels, a public comment opportunity will be facilitated thereafter for two hours by a designated representative of the PAC. Registered participants will be called upon to speak on a first come, first served basis using the raised hand function on the Microsoft Teams platform. Participants will be asked to limit their statements to about 3 minutes. The session is intended to receive public input and will not represent a question-and-answer session. Public input after the meeting will be accepted through the DEP's email singleuseplastics@dep.nj.gov, but the PAC does not intend to issue a formal response to comments document. All discussion from the public meeting will be considered by the PAC in making any recommendations on the bottle bill question to the Governor and Legislature as part of its' second-year report.

The proceedings will be recorded, and all Power Point presentations offered by panelists, as well as the recording, will be made available to the public on the DEP's PAC website.

For more information and for link to attend the meeting, please visit the DEP PAC webpage here: <https://dep.nj.gov/get-past-plastic/plastics-advisory-council/>, or email singleuseplastics@dep.nj.gov.