August 19, 2021

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino, Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2206
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 962 (Kamlager) - Returnable Beverage Bottles - STRONG SUPPORT

Dear Senator Portantino & Committee Members,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are pleased to support AB 962 by Senator Kamlager, as proposed to be amended, to pave the way for returnable beverage bottle systems in California by allowing returnable glass (“refillable”) bottles to flow through the state’s Beverage Container Recycling Program. Rather than being
crushed for recycling, the bottles can be preserved to be washed and refilled by beverage producers - simultaneously creating jobs and reducing waste.

According to California statute, waste reduction holds the highest value on the waste hierarchy; reduce, reuse, and then recycle. Therefore, while downstream waste management is a part of the solution, legislation such as this that is aimed at reducing waste further upstream should be prioritized first and foremost.

The average Californian purchases 2-3 packaged beverages a day, 99.9% of which is in single-use packaging, and the vast majority being plastic. Despite the known environmental, public health, and social costs of plastic, plastic production is skyrocketing, with 380 million tons of new plastic being manufactured every year. From well-head to disposal, plastic pollutes both the environment and human health throughout its lifecycle and is a growing contributor to climate change.

The environmental benefits of returnable glass bottles compared to their single-use counterparts is significant. According to the Container Recycling Institute, returnable glass bottles use approximately 93% less energy and 47-82% less water, depending on the number of reuses. And according to Reloop, as the number of reuse cycles increases, so does the reduction in emissions when compared to single-use glass bottles (~85% less emissions,) single-use PET (~70% less emissions,) and aluminum cans (~57% less emissions.) Current models demonstrate returnable bottles go through 15-20 refills on average.

Returnable bottles also provide enormous economic potential for manufacturers. After the initial purchase, the cost per filling is reduced over the lifecycle of the bottle, allowing manufacturers to benefit from increasing cost savings as the bottles are returned for refill. And for consumers, beverages are generally less expensive in a returnable container than in the same single-use container.

An increase in returnable bottle operations also puts California on the path towards a green economy by providing clean green jobs, including local and regional production line workers, managers, and bottle collectors. Reuse creates as much as 30 times more jobs than landfills.

AB 962 will lay the foundation for a more sustainable and economically viable business model by creating an even playing field for the use of returnable beverage bottles by beverage manufacturers. It does so by authorizing CalRecycle to allow returnable bottles to flow through the state’s Beverage Container Recycling Program without being automatically crushed for recycling. It will also provide bottle washers the same processing payment that is currently paid to certified recyclers, and the same Quality Glass Incentive Payment (QIP) that is currently paid to certified recycling processors.

We have been working closely with CalRecycle to bring down costs, including limiting the bill to glass, and we and respectfully urge your and the rest of the committee’s AYE vote.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
Save Our Shores
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cc: Members, Senate Appropriations Committee
    Senator Sydney Kamlager