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From: stephanie santos <stefania86pop@live.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 4, 2024 12:51 PM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject: Support for the "Bottle Bill"
Attachments: IMG_4157.jpeg

My name is Stephanie Santos, a Lincoln resident, Chair of Lincoln Conservation Commission, and a previous member of the EC4 advisory board. I attended 2022's bottle bill alongside my then 8-year-old son, and attended 2023's. Here i am, 2024, anxiously awaiting SOMETHING to be passed.

Last year, the Lincoln Conservation Commision along with its volunteers picked up approximately 550 bags of trash in our town. I feel confident estimating that 75% of the product picked up were beverage containers, with the number one item found being nips and alcohol containers.

Adding value to these items, I believe, will not only make some individuals think twice about littering, but will also incentivize people to pick up the litter for financial gain, even if it is a small amount. With the cost of living being unaffordable for many, I do believe many individuals will be benefiting from this bill, along with the environment.

I'm sure the bottle and beverage lobbyist will disagree, stating "the key to less litter is more education!" Yes, I agree, we do need more education and perhaps a more standardized trash/recycle system statewide for the school system, but based on the product we are finding, I find it challenging to educate those that are currently littering. Nips and alcohol bottles are the number one product we find, so to simply say "educate" is a highly unattainable goal. How does one educate a person consuming alcohol? How does one educate someone throwing out their nips to hide evidence? And how does one educate the shame one might feel about the product they are consuming?

As an active community member that organizes numerous litter initiatives throughout the year, one thing always struck me. Out of all the years of cleanups, I've never ONCE found an empty Starbucks. Why is that? Starbucks is one of the most popular beverages consumed in the United States, yet I've never ONCE found an empty one thrown on the side of the road. My suspicion is that the higher cost of the product, as compared to Dunkin, generates a population of people that are affluent. With that being said, most affluent individuals are fortunate enough to have a fairly strong educational background. With the bottle bill, i highly double this demographic will be saving their Starbuck containers for 20 cents, but i can ASSURE you that the individuals who are financially struggling to make ends meet will. The person littering their Dunkin will know that this is redeemable, and know that 20 bottles will be 4\$, enough for a fresh Iced coffee. I truly believe there is a direct correlation between litter and lower financial income, which is exactly why the bottle bill will benefit not only the planet, but our citizens.

I'm sure the bottle and beverage lobbyist will say "we need to focus on high litter fines!" Sure. That too. But if I see someone littering , do I call the police and tell an officer I just saw someone throw a bottle out their window? Let's be honest- this is an incredibly hard goal to entertain, which is what makes the bottle bill so alluring. It's an actual achievable attainable goal for the state that will curb the buildup of litter, providing financial gain for those collecting.

The environmental groups supporting the bottle bill are sounding the alarm for Rhode Island. Why are we not listening? My understanding is that the bottle bill is FINALLLY in "study." Well, I can assure you the environmental groups advocating for this bill have been studying this for years, and everyone is in agreement that we need to do SOMETHING.

The fact that Mr. Goldberg, the liquor lobbyist, stated the bottle bill didn't work in 1987 is comical. That was over 30 years ago!! The amount of plastic being pulled out of our rivers, wetlands, and ocean are not showing any signs of relief. The bottle bill is a SIMPLE solution to a massive problem we have here in Rhode Island. Its just MINDBLOWING that "Friends of the Sauguatucket" River group acquired over 80,000 nip bottles throughout Rhode Island in only 90 days. If Rhode Island ever had a rock bottom, this is it. Imagine how many less littered bottles there would be if we officered a financial incentive for people to pick this up? IT WORKS.

I also feel like the state is really overthinking this. We have no need to reinvent the wheel! All we need to do is see what our neighbors in Maine have in place- because what they have is EXACTLY how Rhode Island would operate. Has anyone in this study group heard of any negative feedback from Maine? They seem to be doing pretty well. Listen, no one advocating for this bill is trying to do mom and pop liquor stores dirty. We understand some of these facilities are small and cannot manage these machines due to lack of space, but you can't tell me that Walmart can't. You can't tell me that Stop and Shop can't. There are plenty of options for the state to put in place to make this bill a reality- we just need to come together during this "study" and put all out options on the table to make this a happen for Rhode Islanders.

Let me be clear, there is no one solution for litter. Until these giant manufactures start making product that is biodegradable, litter will continue. The bottle bill is a tool that we need in order to combat this crisis, along with education, along with fines, along with reduction in use, along with high state and city response, and of course, the good ole "Don't litter our clean RHODES" signs.

Let's make 2024 the year RI passes the bottle bill. There's a reason why our neighboring states have this implemented. No one of our legislatures should be giving into the corporate greed over the liquor and bottle lobbyist. Think of your children and the future you are setting them up for if we do not act now. I am asking you to support the bottle bill. Support the future of your state, the Ocean State. If we continue to pass this problem down to the next generation, im going to assume everywhere here in this group is going to accept this as the new norm. It shouldn't have to come to this. Do something.

Stephanie Santos, Lincoln Conservation Commission

Picture inserted is the Blackstone River in LINCOLN (yes, Lincoln not a third world country)