Dear Representatives Howell, LaFave, and Sowerby,

The Container Recycling Institute supports House Bill 5486, which would update the Michigan deposit law to include almost all non-carbonated beverage containers.

Updating the deposit law to include non-carbonated beverages is an idea whose time has come. When Michigan’s bottle bill was enacted in 1976, non-carbonated single-serve beverages simply did not exist. But times have changed, and non-fizzy drinks now make up 42% of the Michigan beverage market, in terms of units sold, and 51% by weight. Non-carbonated beverage containers amount to more than 200,000 tons of glass, plastic and aluminum that must be managed via municipally-funded curbside recycling, or trash pickup and landfilling.

The latter—landfilling—is much more prevalent. According to our derivations based on national recycling rates and those in the nation’s 10 states with deposit systems, the vast majority of non-carbonated beverage containers sold in Michigan are wasted: not recycled, but rather landfilled or littered. Specifically, we estimate that the non-carbonated beverage container recycling rates are as low as 12% for glass, 18% for PET plastic, and 46% for aluminum cans. Contrast this to Michigan’s 92.2% recycling rate for deposit bottles and cans in 2016.

We estimate that over 179,000 tons of beverage bottles and cans are wasted in Michigan annually, including over 2,000 tons of aluminum, over 34,000 tons of PET plastic, and about 143,000 tons of glass. The glass number far outweighs plastic and metal because wine and spirits bottles are so heavy. Had those wasted bottles and cans been recycled through the deposit system, they would have generated nearly $14 million in scrap revenues. Replacing them with new ones made from virgin materials produces 100,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions, and other forms of pollution, resource depletion, and ecosystem damage.

Many of these wasted containers don’t end up in the landfill, but rather as litter along Michigan roadways, parks, streams, beaches, and other public places: posing both an aesthetic nuisance and a financial cost to citizens and businesses for cleanup. In our report, “Estimating Beverage Container Litter Quantities and Cleanup Costs in Michigan” (April 2015), CRI estimated that the existing deposit law saves Michiganders $8.3 million annually in avoided litter abatement costs. If non-carbonated beverages are brought into the deposit system, those savings will mount to an estimated $15 million per year.

Michigan’s bottle bill is Michigan’s most successful recycling program, and its 92% redemption rate is also the highest in the United States. Updating Michigan’s deposit law to include non-carbonated beverages would help secure Michigan’s position as a recycling leader, and would be consistent with Governor Snyder’s recent State of the State goal of tripling the overall state recycling rate.

For all of these reasons, CRI supports the passage of HB 5486.

Sincerely,

Susan Collins
President and Executive Director, Container Recycling Institute

About the Container Recycling Institute: CRI is a nonprofit organization and a leading authority on the economic and environmental impacts of beverage containers and other consumer-product packaging.