Dear Assembly Members Gonzalez, Bigelow, and Committee,

We are writing in support of AB 792, which would require plastic beverage bottle manufacturers to make their bottles out of 100% recycled content by 2035, with intermediate goals to be reached incrementally.

Creating domestic market outlets for plastic beverage bottles is extremely important because plastic bottle waste is growing beyond our capacity to manage it.

Production of plastic bottles has been skyrocketing in California and nationwide, and shows no signs of slowing. Since 2012, PET and HDPE plastic bottle consumption in California has grown by 3.7 billion bottles per year: from 9 billion sold in FY2012, to 12.8 billion sold in FY2018.

The quantity of plastic bottles recycled has also grown: from 6.3 billion bottles in FY2012 to 9.3 billion in FY 2018. In percentage terms, the combined PET and HDPE plastic bottle recycling rate in California has risen during that period from 69% to 73%.

Despite these apparent gains, plastic bottle waste in California has grown from 2.8 billion bottles in FY2012 to 3.4 billion bottles in FY 2018, as Figure 1 shows. In other words, recycling growth has not been able to keep pace with sales growth.
Across the United States, the picture is even more dire. Wasting of PET and HDPE beverage bottles has nearly doubled in just seven years: from 2.0 million tons wasted in 2010 to 3.7 million tons wasted in 2017, as Figure 2 shows.

Most of the PET plastic now collected is being “downcycled” into products with lesser values than plastic beverage bottles.

The vast majority of new plastic beverage bottles are still being made from virgin fossil fuel resources, a production cycle that contributes not only to solid waste, but to greenhouse gas emissions. In the United States, PET plastic food and beverage bottles only contain 7% recycled content on average. Recycled PET beverage bottles are twice as likely to be used in “fiber” applications, like T-shirts or carpet. Other applications include “sheet and film” or “strapping.” Ninety-three percent of the plastic used to make PET beverage bottles is virgin plastic.

It is imperative that we improve recycling rates for beverage bottles and use old bottles to make new bottles again. Otherwise the massive and growing volumes of plastics we consume will clog our landfills; litter our streets, parks, and beaches; and add to the burden of plastics in the oceans. Requiring 100% recycled content in plastic bottles sold in California will incentivize brand owners and bottle manufacturers to work together to develop new collection capacity that can help close the loop and make bottle-to-bottle recycling a reality, saving energy and greenhouse gases in the process.

Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Susan Collins
President, 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.