



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Updated Bottle Bill Heads to November Ballot in Massachusetts

Legislature misses deadline to act

Yesterday, a large group gathered on the steps of the Secretary of State's office to announce completion of an initiative petition signature drive to update the state's bottle bill. Proponents delivered over 19,000 signatures Wednesday to Secretary Galvin's office. Once the signatures are validated by Secretary Galvin, the measure is certified to appear before the voters on November 4. If passed, the ballot question would extend the current nickel deposit on soda and beer to other single serving containers like water, juices, and sports drinks.

"This is common sense policy that updates a tremendously effective law," said Rep. Jon Hecht, (D-Watertown) the lead sponsor, along with Sen. Cynthia Creem (D-Newton), of the measure in the Legislature.

"The people of Massachusetts have spoken loud and clear, over a number of years, that they want less litter and more recycling; they want the Updated Bottle Bill. In the World Cup of legislation, our elected officials let this goal go right through their legs. We did our best to work through Beacon Hill, now it's up to the voters," said Janet Domenitz, Executive Director of MASSPIRG.

An update to the bottle bill has been pending in the state legislature for over 12 years; the original version passed in 1983, before the popularity of bottled water and tea. Although enough legislators support the update to make it law, it has never been brought to a vote in the House, despite passing the Senate during the last two legislative sessions. Opponents to the bill have largely been big business interests include bottlers, supermarkets.

Diverse groups across the state have gathered the needed signatures to put the measure before the voters -- over 130,000 signatures in September, nearly double the number needed, and more than the other proposed ballot measures. Signatures came from every one of the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts, and hundreds of volunteers participated. In May, of this year, supporters gathered 27,000 more signatures.

Among the organizations collecting signatures were MASSPIRG, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, the Milton Garden Club, the Environmental League of Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Sierra Club.

Advocates are bracing for a tough ballot question campaign. Under state law, bottlers and supermarkets can pour unlimited corporate funds into opposing the ballot initiative.

"We'd rather see the bottlers and supermarkets do more to promote recycling, but if they decide to spend millions to defeat this recycling initiative, our volunteers are ready to get the word out to voters," said Phil Sego of the Massachusetts Sierra Club.

Over 100 organizations, 209 cities and towns, the past two Republican and Democratic Governors, and 400 small businesses have endorsed updating the bottle bill.

"Many single serving beverages are consumed on the go, out of the reach of curbside programs. This explains why deposit soda is recycled at 80%, almost quadruple the 23% recycling rate of water bottles," said Susan Collins, President of the Container Recycling Institute. "Updating the bottle bill is a smart idea."

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"Expanding the bottle bill will go a long way toward cleaning up our streets and parks, and will help keep the costs of municipal trash collection down by removing beverage containers from the waste stream," said Anne Borg, co-president, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.

"Despite strong public support, big business will invest millions of dollars in this campaign to avoid responsibility for the trash they create," said George Bachrach, President of the Environmental League of Massachusetts. "This will be an uphill 'David v. Goliath' fight -- Mass citizens v. Corporate America."

If the bottle bill wins in November, Massachusetts would catch up with Maine, Connecticut, New York, Hawaii, California, and Oregon, all of which have added more types of containers to their deposit laws over the past several years.

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