

# Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B



## **RESOLUTION #4B-24-1005** **Calling for a Modern Container Deposit-Return Law** **to Reduce Litter and Improve Recycling Rates** **Adopted October 28, 2024**

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B (Commission) takes note of the following:

- The United States has a litter crisis. According to Keep America Beautiful’s [2020 National Litter Study](#), nearly 50 billion pieces of litter line U.S. roadways and waterways, with more than 2,000 piece of litter per mile and 152 pieces of litter for each U.S. resident. Cigarette butts top the list, followed by plastic films such as candy wrappers and snack bags. There is twice as much litter from alcoholic beverage containers as from non-alcoholic beverage containers. Plastic is the most common material, making up 38.6% of all litter, followed by paper, metal, and glass.
- The District of Columbia is inundated with container pollution, and the city [often relies on volunteer labor](#) – which can only go so far – to clean up litter. Commissioners within Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B regularly host and attend neighborhood cleanups, even including a week of daily cleanups, with no shortage of neighborhood litter. Litter continues to negatively impact local neighborhoods despite robust Commission and volunteer efforts to address the issue.
- While container litter and dumping is found throughout the District, it most adversely affects residents of Wards 5, 7, and 8, all of which border the Anacostia River. The [Return, Refund, and Recycle Coalition for DC has said](#) that more than 18,000 pounds of litter and bulk trash were removed from the Anacostia River during Anacostia Riverkeeper cleanups in 2023, including more than 4,800 pounds of beverage containers. The Anacostia River is one of only three rivers in the United States that the Environmental Protection Agency has deemed “[impaired by trash](#).”

- While the District has made some strides in its recycling programs, including setting [strong waste diversion goals](#) and [reducing recycling contamination](#), much more work needs to be done. According to the Container Recycling Institute’s [2021 Beverage Market Data Analysis](#), almost 464.5 million beverage containers sold annually in the District are not recycled, more than three quarters of the more than 617 million beverage containers sold in the District each year. Of the 617 million beverage containers sold annually in the District, 345 million (over 55 percent) are plastic bottles; more than 180 million (nearly 30 percent) are aluminum cans; and nearly 92 million (almost 15%) are glass bottles.
- Container deposit-return laws – sometimes referred to as “bottle bills” – [reduce litter and improve recycling](#). States with container deposit-return laws see significantly less litter per capita, particularly for deposit materials. These laws add a small deposit to the price of an item when purchased, which is then refunded to the consumer when they return the empty container to a designated retailer or recycling center, thereby incentivizing them to recycle by providing a financial reward for doing so. Container deposit-return laws [shift the cost of recycling containers](#) from taxpayers as a whole to the manufacturers who produce them. This is different from traditional municipal recycling programs, where taxpayers pay for processing containers even if they do not use them.
- [Container deposit-return laws are not new](#): Oregon was the first state to pass a bill in 1971, and ten states already have deposit programs. The [ten container deposit-return law states](#), including California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York and Oregon, account for 27% of the US population, yet [provide over 50% of all bottles recycled in the United States](#). Container deposit-return laws [vary by state](#) in terms of beverages covered, amount of deposit, handling fees, and what happens to unredeemed deposits, among other features, but [what is consistent is their effectiveness in addressing litter](#). Put simply: [states with container deposit-return laws recycle at much higher rates than those with other recycling programs](#).
- The District’s unique regional landscape poses one of the biggest hurdles to a strong and effective container deposit-return law. The proximity and interconnectedness of DC, Maryland, and Virginia requires coordination and alignment to ensure the strongest program possible, and such coordination likely requires political will and strong leadership from DC’s elected officials. Failure to coordinate risks rendering a DC-based program overly costly, where deposit returns exceed container purchases in the District (*e.g.*, where those from neighboring states return their containers in DC for a deposit and overburden the program). There may be mechanisms that address this challenge if broader coordination is not possible, including consideration of a cap on deposit returns based on the number of containers sold in DC, tying deposit returns to DC residency, or something else. Any such mechanism is likely inferior to regional coordination and will require careful consideration to not create

undue burden and to ensure that individuals in all parts of DC can easily return containers for deposit refunds.

- A strong and effective container deposit-return law also requires analyzing the impact of such a law on the District's existing curbside recycling program, which generates redemption revenue for the District Department of Public Works. A container deposit-return law is likely to deplete materials in the curbside recycling stream, thereby reducing revenue generating items from the curbside system. To be clear, this is not an inherently negative outcome, as it corresponds to better waste diversion, recycling, and reduced litter resulting from a container deposit-return law. In crafting such a law, however, it will likely be necessary to consider [the impact of such a law on redemption revenue for the Department of Public Works by diverting high-value materials](#) and mechanisms to [fill any revenue gap](#). Money saved from reduced litter – *i.e.*, less money spent on addressing dumping and on street sweeping – may cover some of the gap.
- In addition, implementation of a container deposit-return law in DC will require consideration of the physical space and infrastructure necessary for such a program. As DC hopefully moves to a more robust recycling and reuse economy overall, physical infrastructure could be designed to enhance broader efforts. DC is not starting from scratch and can consider [mechanisms used to address commercial food waste diversion](#), for example. DC recently passed legislation requiring the District's largest commercial generators of food waste to begin implementing diversion strategies to keep their food waste out of the trash. Under this program, selected food waste generators are required to establish food waste diversion programs and divert back-of-the house commercial food waste. This may provide a useful model regarding physical space and infrastructure needs regarding a container deposit-return law.
- Equity considerations are essential in implementing a strong and effective container deposit-return law, which will require consideration of the allocation of any unclaimed deposits in a manner that supports the District's environmental efforts and recognizes [the disproportionate impact of environmental pollution and other harms on specific communities](#). The Commission supports allowing non-profit organizations, including school parent-teacher organizations and faith-based organizations, to mobilize container drives as a fundraising mechanism, as well as other efforts to ensure low-income families benefit from a container deposit-return law. As noted above, implementation is crucial and all individuals in all parts of DC should be able to easily return containers for deposit refunds.
- The Commission is thankful for work of other Advisory Neighborhood Commissions in calling for a strong and equitable container deposit-return law, including [Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5F](#) and [Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3C](#). Advisory Neighborhood

Commission 4B's Vision Zero Committee considered this Resolution at the Committee's October 16, 2024, meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B supports a strong, equitable container deposit-return law for the District and calls on the DC Council to introduce such legislation and promptly hold hearings, including engaging with experts on the specific type of container deposit-return law that will work best for DC.
- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the DC Council to exercise strong leadership and political will needed to coordinate regionally to ensure a successful container-deposit return system, as well as to consider the impacts of a container deposit-return law on the District's curbside recycling system and the possible need to fill revenue gaps; physical space and infrastructure needs for implementation; and overarching and important equity considerations to ensure the benefits of a container deposit-return law reach low-income and underserved communities most impacted by environmental injustices.

**FURTHER RESOLVED:**

That the Commission designates Commissioner Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02, Commissioner Evan Yeats, ANC 4B04, Commissioner Alison Brooks, ANC 4B08, and Commissioner Zurick T. Smith, ANC 4B03, to represent the Commission in all matters relating to this Resolution.

**FURTHER RESOLVED:**

That, in the event the designated representative Commissioners cannot carry out their representative duties for any reason, the Commission authorizes the Chair to designate another Commissioner to represent the Commission in all matter relating to this Resolution.

**FURTHER RESOLVED:**

That, consistent with DC Code § 1-309, only actions of the full Commission voting in a properly noticed public meeting have standing and carry great weight. The actions, positions, and opinions of individual commissioners, insofar as they may be contradictory to or otherwise inconsistent with the expressed position of the full Commission in a properly adopted resolution or letter, have no standing and cannot be considered as in any way associated with the Commission.

**ADOPTED** by voice vote at a regular public meeting (notice of which was properly given, and at which a quorum of seven members was present) on October 28, 2024, by a vote of 7 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions.