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October 1, 2025

**Testimony of Vanessa Batters-Thompson, Executive Director,
DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice**

**Committee on Business and Economic Development:
Chairman Kenyan McDuffie**

**B26-0058, The Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction
Amendment Act of 2025**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025. My name is Vanessa Batters-Thompson, and I am the executive director of the DC Appleseed Center for Law & Justice. DC Appleseed is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that aims to make the District a better place to live and work through advocacy, collaboration, coordination, and litigation. Throughout our history, we have taken on some of the District's most challenging problems, developed proposed solutions to those problems, and then worked to implement our proposed solutions. DC Appleseed's projects all focus on democracy, equity, and economic growth within the city.

For nearly 30 years, DC Appleseed has worked to restore the Anacostia River and make it a safe and vital resource for recreation, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization. Today, we are closer than ever to realizing that goal, with restoration projects like the Anacostia River Sediment Project moving forward, as well as flagship projects like the 11th Street Bridge Park and the redevelopment of RFK stadium on the horizon. The passage of this proposed legislation would be an unequivocal win for Anacostia River, as you will hear from many of my peers and colleagues.

Because we are before the Committee on Business and Economic Development for today's hearing, I will focus my testimony on the ways this bill was carefully drafted to minimize negative impacts on local businesses and create new opportunities for entrepreneurs. During the drafting process for this bill, Councilmember Nadeau and her staff engaged many members of the business community, and their input is reflected in the

legislation. As introduced, the legislation exempts small retailers and locations that sell

beverages for onsite consumption, limits fees on smaller distributors, and will help create new green jobs and economic opportunities for DC residents.

The proposed legislation exempts several types of retailers, and it compensates participating retailers for handling returned containers.

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and actions of the current federal administration have negatively impacted small businesses operating in the District. The proposed legislation accounts for that reality by carefully limiting the responsibility of smaller businesses and offering all businesses an array of options for compliance. This bill intentionally excludes two categories of businesses: small retailers with less than 2,000 square feet of retail space, as well as bars, restaurants, or hotels selling their products for onsite consumption.¹ These businesses are under no obligation to accept the return of containers by consumers.

Larger retailers accepting returned containers will initially be compensated at the rate of \$.04 per container, and that redemption rate can be increased after five years if necessary to ensure adequate redemption sites.² The legislation provides a wide array of options for how retailers can structure their redemption programs. Options include direct returns, account-based bulk-processing, bag drop programs, and reverse vending machines.³ Research suggests that retailers that serve as redemption sites may benefit economically: 87% of consumers who returned containers within a store were prepared to spend their redemption at that store.⁴ Studies of consumer behavior suggest that retail locations with efficient bottle return sites see more foot traffic and sales.⁵ Under this legislation, retailers can also choose how they process returned containers: they may take returns to a redemption site, or they may elect to coordinate a pick up via a collection agent.

The proposed legislation limits impacts on smaller distributors.

Currently, DC's tax payers shoulder most of the cost for collecting and recycling beverage containers and cleaning containers up as litter. Under the proposed legislation, beverage distributors selling to DC retailers assume some responsibility for the significant cost of managing used containers. Distributors will pay a yearly fee to a beverage stewardship organization based on several factors related to the costs and ease of collecting, recycling, and reusing the bottles produced by that distributor.⁶ However, the proposed legislation includes an

¹Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025, D.C. Bill B26-0058, 26th Council Sess. (2025), lines 102-107, p.5, online at <https://lirms.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/56928/Introduction/B26-0058-Introduction.pdf?id=204679>.

²Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025, lines 443-450, p. 19.

³Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025, lines 463-468, p. 20.

⁴"How Recycling Habits Impact Shopping Behavior." TOMRA, (2023) p. 11, online at <https://collection.tomra.com/consumer-research-report>

⁵See Joseph Stelling and Laura Haight, "Shop Where You Drop: A Survey of Consumer Bottler Return Habits," New York Public Interest Research Group (Feb. 4, 2013) online at <https://www.nypirg.org/pubs/enviro/2013.02.04ShopWhereYouDrop.pdf>. See also "How Recycling Habits Impact Shopping Behavior" TOMRA (Feb. 2023) online at <https://collection.tomra.com/consumer-research-report>

⁶Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025, lines 298-312, p. 13-14.

exemption for smaller distributors, like microbreweries, that sell fewer than 3.5 million redeemable beverage containers per year. These smaller distributors are exempt from the \$.04 handling fee assessed to larger distributors and will pay membership fees that reflect their smaller proportional share of all redeemable beverage containers sold in the District the prior year.⁷

The proposed legislation will create new green jobs and economic opportunities for DC residents.

The Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan sets a goal of growing and diversifying the District's economy, focusing on sustainability, climate, and resilience industries.⁸ From the experiences of the ten U.S. states with bottle deposit laws currently in place, we can forecast some of the positive economic effects of passing the proposed legislation. This legislation would create multiple types of jobs related to the sorting, collection, transportation, and recycling of containers. In New York, the bottle return system directly employs 3,275 full-time equivalent employees and indirectly supports 2,451 full-time equivalent jobs.⁹ In Massachusetts, approximately 1,480 full-time equivalent jobs are attributed to their container recycling system.¹⁰ In many states with container deposit laws, worker-owned coops that collect and recycle containers become a core part of the system.

In addition to roles in the formal economy, container deposit laws often create a "cottage industry" for container collections. Container drives can provide necessary revenue to nonprofit organizations and schools through recycling fundraisers. Entrepreneurs of all ages can generate income by collecting discarded containers and returning them for deposits. These opportunities may be particularly attractive to people who face barriers to engagement in traditional workforce roles, such as teens and returning citizens.

Conclusion

In summary, the proposed legislation carefully mitigates potential downsides for smaller retailers and distributors. At the same time, it is likely to generate new opportunities for entrepreneurs and the green jobs sector. Given the beneficial impacts for our environment and the careful approach to ensuring the District's businesses can grow and thrive, DC Appleseed urges this Committee to report favorably on this legislation.

⁷Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025, lines 313-36, p. 14.

⁸"Sustainable D.C. 2.0 Plan, D.C. Department of Energy and Environment (Apr. 2019) p. 56, online at <https://sustainable.dc.gov/sdc2>

⁹Sarah Edwards, et. al. "Employment and Economic Impact of Container Deposits." *Eunomia*, (Oct. 28, 2018) online at <https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/New-York-Report-v4-Clean-Full.pdf>

¹⁰"Massachusetts Container Deposit Return System: 2016 Employment and Economic Impacts in the Commonwealth." Industrial Economics, Incorporated (2016) p. 1, online at https://www.container-recycling.org/images/stories/PDF/MA%20CDR%20Employment%20and%20Economic%20Impacts%20Report_IEc%206-8-2017.pdf