



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

October 21, 2020

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Massachusetts State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Michlewitz,

On behalf of the Zero Waste Caucus, we write regarding two budgetary priorities for the FY21 budget that will both help reduce waste in the Commonwealth and raise revenues. We recognize that this fiscal year will be challenging, and we hope that the suggestions provided here will help to not only alleviate some of the budgetary strain, but strain on our environment as well.

1. Full Funding for MassDEP

We are requesting that the House budget meet or exceed the Governor's H2 budget request of \$33.65 million for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) line item (MA DEP Administration, 2200-0100). As you know, this amount represents a slight decrease from the FY20 line item of \$34.55 million, and is significantly below the FY09 appropriation of over \$36 million. Nonetheless, given the constraints on the budget due to the COVID-19 crisis, we believe the figure appropriated in H2 is a sufficient funding level for the short term, and we will continue to advocate for restoring FY09 levels as possible.

MassDEP is the department responsible for protecting air, land, and water in the Commonwealth, in addition to overseeing waste management and providing support to municipalities on environmental issues. Thus, its funding is mission critical. MassDEP has lost staff repeatedly over the last two decades, and without sufficient full-time employees, existing laws that the Legislature has promulgated cannot be enforced.

MassDEP has acknowledged repeatedly that about 40% of the waste going into landfills and incinerators from Massachusetts includes waste ban items that are not legally allowed to be discarded in this manner. The department has had about three full-time employee's worth of hours over the last ten years, but at certain points there was no one doing inspections at all. One head of the waste bureau said that six full-time employees dedicated to waste ban inspections would be enough to divert significant waste from landfills and incinerators. Indeed, adequate and full funding of MassDEP could keep over two million tons of refuse from our waste system annually, protecting vulnerable communities from toxics (six of the seven incinerators in our state are located in Environmental Justice Communities), preserving air and water quality, and saving cities and towns considerable money.

2. Increased and Expanded Bottle Deposit to Generate Revenue

The bottle deposit law covers less than half of the bottles and cans sold in the Commonwealth, and those that are covered by it are redeemed for a nickel. Over the years, the amount of people redeeming their bottles has declined, leading to more municipal recycling at a cost to our communities. If we include more bottles – water, tea, juice, liquor, wine, etc.—and raise the fee to a dime, several things would happen:

1. **The Commonwealth would earn approximately \$90 million dollars in additional revenue per year on its redemption program.** Right now, Massachusetts receives about \$53.6 million annually in uncollected bottle deposit fees. Since one goal in changing the fee structure is to improve compliance, it is generally recognized that an increase in the per bottle fee would induce greater participation in the returns program (theoretically leading to a decline in current revenues). However, based on an analysis done by the Container Recycling Institute, applying the fee to a broader number of containers would yield new revenue gains of approximately \$90 million. Even with a lower percentage of unredeemed bottles, given its application to a broader universe of containers, coupled with a higher fee for those uncollected bottles, revenues would still increase.
2. **Cities and towns would save significantly on recycling costs.** Currently, Boston and many municipalities across the state, especially in western Massachusetts, are paying \$145 a ton for recycling. The glass from liquor and wine bottles alone would decrease the tonnage in every municipality's blue bins.
3. **More bottles and cans would be recycled through the redemption process.**

By fully funding MassDEP and expanding the scope of the bottle deposit law, we can ensure enforcement of existing waste disposal regulations while raising revenue and encouraging more recycling as we reduce costs to cities and towns.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters. We look forward to working with you and your staff as we develop and debate the FY21 budget.

Sincerely,

Michelle Ciccolo
House Chair, Zero Waste Caucus
15th Middlesex District

RoseLee Vincent
16th Suffolk District

Smitty Pignatelli
4th Berkshire District

Joan Meschino
3rd Plymouth District

Jack Lewis
7th Middlesex District

Dave Rogers
24th Middlesex District

Jonathan Hecht
29th Middlesex District

Lindsay Sabadosa
1st Hampshire District

Peter Capano
11th Essex District

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1st Franklin District

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