

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
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**ZERO WASTE CAUCUS**

April 12, 2021

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 FY22 budget that will both help reduce waste in the Commonwealth and raise revenue. We recognize that, like last year, this budget cycle 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. Robust Funding for MassDEP**

We are requesting that the House increase funding for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) line item (MA DEP Administration, 2200-0100) to the amount of \$41 million, which is significantly higher than the Governor's H1 budget request of \$33.12 million, but only a modest increase from the FY21 line item of \$39.78 million.

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. A \$1 million increase will allow the department to hire back between 10-12 employees and begin to build back the capacity it desperately needs in order to enforce the laws currently on the books.

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. To carry out inspections, the department has had about three full-time employee's worth of demand 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 while saving cities and towns considerable money.

In 2015 MassDEP lost a significant amount of its senior workforce due to incentives provided through the early retirement program. It has still not built back its capacity and is operating at 25% less staffing than it was in 2009. This is unacceptable, and if we are serious about our environment and enforcing our laws, we need to rebuild the DEP.

## **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 consumers 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—as proposed in HD.4039 filed by Chair Decker—several things would happen:

**1. The Commonwealth would earn approximately \$90 million 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, if the fee were applied 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 continue to 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 FY22 budget.

Sincerely,



Michelle Ciccolo  
House Chair, Zero Waste Caucus