



# **Allegany Beverage & Redemption Center**

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### ***Testimony of Anndrea Sprague, Manager***

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Did your parents teach you to pick up pennies, nickels, any coins off the ground? A heads up penny..."It's good luck", is what my mom would say and it is what I tell my two small boys too. In 2007, I learned something else on the ground was just as valuable as those coins: plastic bottles and aluminum cans. When I was fourteen years old, my parents entered the redemption center industry and I learned that there was money all over the ground. Sometimes you did not even have to look hard. Driving with my dad to school or riding along to our store we would keep our eyes on the side of the road, each taking turns to yell out when we saw a can or a bottle. Slowly he'd pull over so I could jump out to grab it knowing I had just put 7cents in my pocket and over time realizing how all of my pennies could add up.

In 2009 when the handling fee increased to 8.5 cents our family was ecstatic. We knew that we needed to make all of our pennies count. It became a running joke around our small town; my dad looking to his fellow small business owners, friends, customers we would see out and about and calling out "eight and a half cents" anytime there would be a can or bottle left somewhere. And here we are 17 years later still making the same joke but it is starting to get very old because our business hasn't seen a raise in that long.

In the span of that 17 years I have graduated high school, earned a bachelor's degree, went back to school/passed my board exam to be a licensed physical therapist assistant, moved across the country, got married, bought a house, worked in healthcare through the COVID19 pandemic, started a family, sold a house, moved back across the country, bought another house, came back to work at my parents' redemption center in hopes that they could slow down and think about retirement, but you know what has not changed.....anything in this industry. The state still has not modernized the law. They have not raised the handling fee for small businesses. They have not expanded the containers covered to keep up with consumer preferences. They have not increased the deposit on containers to make it an amount that is worth it for people to redeem them and keep them out of curbside trash.

It has become personal. New York State does not care about small businesses and they do not care about our solid waste crisis. I should not have to think that my children will be trying to establish themselves as adults while also worrying about where their trash will go because in two decades the landfills in New York State will reach maturity. My hard working parents should not be trying to run their business on the same handling fee now 17 years later. No one, not even a very dedicated individual, would stay at a job that they were being paid the same rate for 17 years. New York State does not ask minimum wage employees to do that; why are they expecting their small businesses to.

In Governor Kathy Hochul's State of the State on January 13th she said "When people work hard, when someone has their back, it can change the entire course of their life". She is right, my parents have my back, they have instilled a very hard working nature since myself and my sisters were very young. But, who has their back? Not NYS for the last 17 years. She talked about an affordability crisis. Yes, the redemption industry has felt it for a very long time. We are rubbing our pennies together trying to stretch them in as many ways as we can all while watching NYS get 80% of the unclaimed to hopefully put to good use and 20% to big beverage businesses who continue to be the biggest oppressors to our progress as an industry. The state could gain over \$100 Million if they would modernize the bottle bill. Our redemption industry could see a raise to allow us

to survive. Middle and lower class people who use this system as a secondary or even primary source of income could see some extra spending money in their pocket with a deposit increase.

Governor Hochul said she wanted to talk to small businesses from every corner of New York to learn about them and what their barriers are. Well, from the working class city of Olean, the outdated bottle bill is the barrier. We are an asset to our community. We aid in the fundraising efforts of over 200 different school programs, groups, organizations, American Legions, VFW's etc who look to us to help raise money and funds through can and bottle drives. If our store is unable to keep up with the business operational costs because we cannot get a raise, what will they do? How will they make their money to continue on themselves? Many redemption centers across the state are closing because they cannot afford to keep their doors open at the same pay rate for 17 years. We cannot continue to take in non-deposit aluminum and non-deposit plastic containers because consumer preferences are broader now including lemonades, teas, canned cocktails, and many others.

To consider the potential, the modernization of the Bottle Bill as outlined by S5684/A6543 would allow us to continue to function as an industry. We can continue to offer above average pay for our workers without financial burden to our small business. It would create jobs as we would need to keep up with the natural increased demand that would occur from expanding the containers covered and increasing the deposit to ten cents. The state could increase its revenue to aid in different programs to give back to the people of New York. We could try to chip away at our solid waste crisis by diverting returnables to redemption centers instead of to landfills.

As with anything, there will be opposition. When you are hearing those opposing arguments please think about our small business. Please think of the twelve employees at Allegany Beverage & Redemption Center whose families rely on their paycheck to put food on the table for their families. Think about the local family who is paying for their child's medical bills with the cans people are dropping off to donate and raise money as well as raise up their family through this kind action. Think about the little league baseball team that will buy new uniforms after their spring can and bottle drive. Please, just think about those things when someone tries to present an argument that could oppose this bill.