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### **Testimony of Jade Eddy**

Owner, MT Returnables

Joint Legislative Hearing/Public Protection

Chair and members of the Committee,

I am submitting this testimony because New Yorkers are being financially harmed by a system they are **required** to participate in — and that harm falls directly within the scope of public protection. Every day, New Yorkers are required to pay a deposit on beverage containers. The Returnable Container Act promise is straightforward: pay a deposit, return the container to keep New York clean, retrieve your money.

That promise is no longer being upheld.

Redemption centers across New York are closing at an accelerating pace because the handling fee that sustains them has remained frozen for nearly two decades, despite dramatic increases in labor, utilities, insurance, rent, and other operating costs. Payroll costs alone have gone up 130%. **200--roughly 30%--of the state's centers have closed since 2023**, because they can't keep up. As centers disappear, so does consumer access. When access disappears, consumers do not stop paying deposits.

They simply lose the ability to retrieve their money back.

Since the state began retaining 80 percent of unredeemed deposits, it has collected nearly \$2 billion from this system. Those funds were generated by consumers participating in a program intended to encourage recycling and return deposit money to the public.

Redemption access has steadily declined in the years following the decision to redirect the unredeemed deposits to the State. That policy change fundamentally altered how the system was supported—meaning not at all.

Without consistent reinvestment into redemption infrastructure, closures accelerated and consumer access eroded.

I now have customers traveling 30 to 45 minutes to return their containers because nearby options have closed, stores have limitations or are refusing returns altogether. Even where retail locations technically exist, practical access has narrowed dramatically.

Consumers should not have to cross counties to retrieve money they were required to pay. Every additional hurdle — distance, limited hours, refusal, confusion — increases the likelihood that deposits will go unredeemed. When access shrinks, forfeitures grow. And so does the General Fund. Turning this incentive into a hidden tax.

**A system that benefits financially from declining access presents a serious consumer protection concern.**

In addition, outdated Bottle Bill language has created marketplace confusion. Containers that appear identical are treated differently under the law. Consumers attempt to return them in good faith, believing they paid a deposit.

Redemption centers are forced to sort and reject large volumes of non-covered containers without compensation. This creates frustration, conflict, and financial strain — all rooted in statutory neglect.

Seniors, low-income households and families rely on deposit returns to meet basic expenses amid increasing costs of living. Community organizations rely on redemption centers for high volume returns and bottle drive fundraisers. As redemption locations shrink, those New Yorkers are effectively forced to forfeit money they were promised the opportunity to reclaim.

Organizations returning tens of thousands of dollars' worth of containers annually will not be able to turn to stores when their redemption center closes. Some face a complete end to their programs as deposit money accounts for majority of their budget.

My account holders are incredible assets to our community. Their programs help fund school sports teams, church youth programs, stock food pantries, support veterans' mental health services, and so much more.

When redemption access disappears, those programs lose funding. This is not about losing spare change. It is about **losing the financial backbone of some of the most compassionate and community-driven efforts** in our neighborhoods. It puts the best parts of our communities on the line.

The Public Protection Committee exists to prevent systems from financially harming the people they are meant to serve.

New Yorkers are required to participate in a program that no longer provides reasonable access, transparency, or fairness. That is not consumer protection. It is systemic abuse resulting in eroded trust.

If Bottle Bill reforms — including correcting the handling fee and expanding container coverage — are not included in the state budget, the Legislature is effectively affirming the continued deterioration of this system and the continued financial harm to New Yorkers who fund it.

A consumer-funded program that no longer functions as promised cannot continue to be ignored.

I urge this Committee to recognize the financial and structural harm being imposed on residents and to ensure that the budget includes meaningful reforms to restore access, reinvest unredeemed deposits into the system, and protect New Yorkers from further loss.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jade Eddy  
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