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EDITORIAL

Require 5-Cent Deposits on Juice, Water Bottles Too

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Think of the satisfying crunch or tinkle every time the recycling machine in your supermarket accepts a soda can or beer bottle. Now think of the disappointing clunk every time it rejects a container emptied of spring water or fruit juice. A bill in the Assembly would remove the clunks by imposing nickel deposits on beverages that the original law never contemplated. That makes excellent sense.

When the bottle bill was signed in 1982, individual bottles of iced tea, juice or spring water made up an almost invisible share of the beverage market. So the bill covered only carbonated beverages, a provision that some activists like to call "the burp clause."

Now those alternate drinks make up an estimated 22 percent of the beverage containers sold in New York. But there's no deposit on them. So people don't return them to supermarkets to get their nickel back, and municipal curbside recycling programs don't want them.

That's why the time is ripe for the bill sponsored by Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee Chairman Thomas DiNapoli (D-Thomaston).

The original bill was designed to remove litter by giving people an incentive to pick up discarded bottles from the streets, and it has succeeded. Unless DiNapoli's bill passes, the containers from beverages not covered by the law will increasingly be littering the streets.

DiNapoli's bill would also recoup an estimated \$84 million a year that the industry keeps when people fail to redeem the containers. The industry argues that the redemption system is so expensive that it should keep the unclaimed nickels, but courts in other states have ruled that the nickels belong to the public.

In the end, there may have to be a compromise on the issue of unredeemed nickels. But the industry makes substantial profits by selling beverages in containers that become litter, and it has some obligation to make sure they are picked up. So we hope this bill gets a Senate sponsor soon and passes this year.