

Northeast Public Radio



Supermarket Industry Seeks Bottle Law Repeal

Karen DeWitt
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ALBANY, NEW YORK - A coalition of supermarket chains and union leaders is backing a bill that would repeal the state's beverage container deposit law, in favor of a fee on the supermarket and beverage industry that they say would pay for increased recycling projects around the state.

Tom Cullen, Chairman of the Food Industry Alliance, a lobby group for supermarket chains, says that approach would be more efficient than the current system of bringing empty bottles back to stores. He says the chain of stores which he manages constantly battles dirt and health problems caused by the bottle collection areas. He says expanding the bottle law further is a "bad idea" .

"We're becoming a garbage dump for the bottle law ," he said.

Jim Rogers, also with the Food Industry Alliance, says things have changed since the bottle law was enacted 22 years ago in New York. For instance, he says, back then there was no such thing as curbside recycling.

"The most effective way to recycle...is at the end of each of your driveways ," he said.

Environmental groups say the bill has been introduced to block their efforts to expand the state's bottle law to include deposits on bottled juice, tea and water. Laura Haight, with the New York Public Interest Research Group, says a debate on the expansion bill is expected on the Assembly floor later this month. It has several Majority Party sponsors in the Senate.

"My view is that this bill is a smokescreen and it's meant to divert attention and to stop the forward motion of the bottle bill," she said.

Jennifer Gitlitz, with the national group Container Recycling Institute, says similar bills have been introduced by the supermarket industry in other states to try to repeal bottle laws or block their expansions.

Gitlitz says opponents of the bottle laws frame the debate as a choice between container deposits or recycling, but she says states that do both actually have higher rates of recycling overall.

The bill supported by the supermarket industry has a Majority Party sponsor in each house, in the Assembly it's the Majority Leader, Paul Tokasz, of Buffalo, and in the Senate, Senator Tom Libous, of Binghamton. The emergence of the bill to repeal the bottle law, coming just three weeks before the scheduled end of the legislative session, makes it more likely that the issue of expanding the state's bottle law will remain unresolved this year.

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