



January 8, 2024

Dear Members of the Massachusetts Legislature:

We write to you on behalf of [Plastic Free Mass](#), a coalition working to protect our communities and natural resources through policies that move Massachusetts toward a cleaner future.

So far this year, Plastic Free Mass members and our allies have spent countless hours cleaning up litter from Massachusetts' communities, beaches, and waterways. Month after month, we picked up trash only to see more litter replace it. As Mary Lou Nicholson – one of our members – says, “It’s a Sisyphean task, coming back again and again to clean up the same spots. But it doesn’t have to be this way.” We already know of a tried-and-true solution that will slash litter: **a modernized Bottle Bill**.

[90%](#) of U.S. residents think that litter is a problem in their state. Massachusetts is no exception. That’s why we are writing to urge you to update our state’s antiquated beverage container deposit return system (aka Bottle Bill). With a robust Bottle Bill in place, Massachusetts can expect to see a significant reduction in litter.

Trash Is Choking Our Beaches and Waterways

Sadly, Massachusetts’ precious beaches attract much more than vacationers. Every year, copious amounts of litter enter our waterways, make their way into the ocean, and wash up on our shores. Volunteers across the state – including Plastic Free Mass members and our allies – work tirelessly to keep our communities clean. But we can’t keep up with the onslaught of litter.

So far this year, community groups across the Commonwealth have collected thousands of pounds of litter. **The following data capture just a snapshot of the toll that trash takes on our communities and our efforts to keep up with this crisis:**

Be the Solution to Pollution

[Be the Solution to Pollution](#) completed 14 clean-up events at 6 different beaches along Massachusetts’ South Shore, where volunteers collected over 3,000 pounds of litter.

Date	Location	Trash collected
January	One-eighth of a mile of shoreline, Fairhaven	304.0 lbs
February	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	36.0 lbs
March	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	262.5 lbs
April	Fort Taber, New Bedford	209.0 lbs
April	Jones Beach, Dartmouth	202.0 lbs
May	Palmer's Island New Bedford	476.5 lbs
May	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	70.0 lbs
June	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	307.5 lbs
July	One-eighth of a mile of shoreline, Fairhaven	203.0 lbs
September	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	129.0 lbs
September	West Beach, Fairhaven	235.0 lbs
October	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	414.0 lbs
November	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	18.5 lbs
December	Fort Phoenix Beach, Fairhaven	304.9 lbs
	Total	3,171.9 lbs

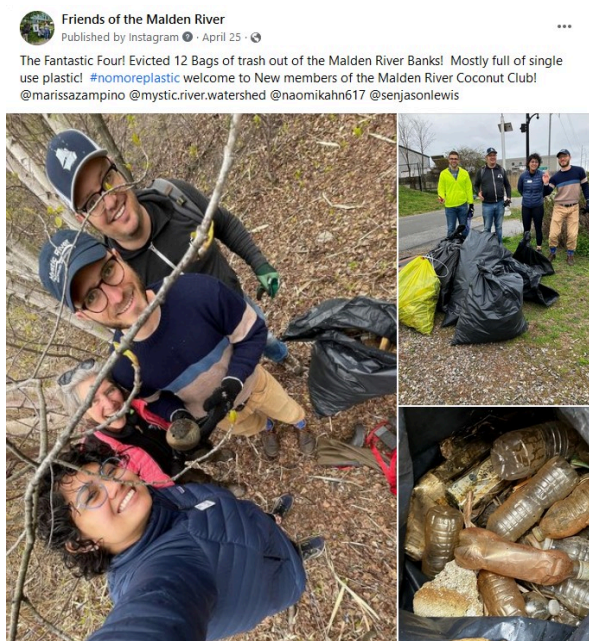
The group also tackled our littered rivers when it cleaned out 27.8 pounds in May from the Lees River Road embankment in Swansea and 566.6 pounds in November from the Acushnet River in New Bedford.

Sustainable Marblehead

Between June and August, [Sustainable Marblehead](#) removed 25 pounds of largely plastic litter from Devereux, Riverhead, and Goldthwait beaches on the North Shore.

Friends of the Malden River

Massachusetts' rivers and streams are also choking with trash. In April, [Friends of the Malden River](#) filled up 51 thirty-two-gallon trash bags with litter (equivalent to roughly 20 full bathtubs) from along the river's edge in Medford. On Earth Day, volunteers in Everett filled 12 thirty-two-gallon bags with litter (nearly 400 gallons).



Wahconah Regional High School

Young people are also volunteering to clean up our waterways. This summer in Western Massachusetts, for example, 23 students from [Wahconah Regional High School](#) donned waders and climbed into kayaks to clean trash out of the West Branch of the Housatonic River.

Hadley Climate Change Committee

In April, the [Hadley Climate Change Committee](#) facilitated the third annual Hadley Spring Clean Up Day, in which volunteers, including a dozen high school students, filled over 100 trash bags with litter.



Beverage Containers – A Big Culprit of Litter Pollution

Across the board, single-use beverage containers comprised a large percentage of the trash that volunteers collected in 2023.

- At the November cleanup in New Bedford, Be the Solution to Pollution volunteers counted **246 miniature alcohol “nips” bottles** and **565 non-carbonated beverage plastic bottles**.
- And, at the Fort Phoenix Beach clean-up this month, they counted **96 nips** and **273 non-carbonated beverage containers**.



- Friends of the Malden River retrieved **1,800 single-use plastic bottles** from the river in the Medford clean-up, and **9 thirty-two-gallon trash bags of single-use plastic bottles** in Everett.



- Over the spring and summer, Sustainable Marblehead volunteers collected **2,654 beverage container caps and plastic lids**.
- Meanwhile, volunteers who empty the [Malden River Trash Trap](#) remove countless single-use plastic bottle caps every time they empty the trap.



What's more, Plastic Free Mass members, like Megan Pogash of [The Climate Reality Project's MA Southcoast Chapter](#), find themselves picking up nips, water bottles, and other beverage containers when they are just visiting parks and other outdoor recreation areas with their families – not even participating in organized clean-up events. **We just can't seem to escape beverage container litter.**

Updating Massachusetts' Bottle Bill Will Reduce Litter

Massachusetts is one of ten states in the U.S. with a beverage container deposit return system. But our Bottle Bill is sorely outdated. The program barely covers [40%](#) of the beverage containers sold in our state. And the 5-cent deposit hasn't increased since the bill passed in 1982. **Updating the Bottle Bill – to include all beverage containers and increase the deposit to 10-cents – would significantly [reduce litter](#) in Massachusetts.**

Updating Massachusetts' Bottle Bill Will Slash Toxic Emissions

Our beverage container trash problem also worsens our climate change crisis. And a Bottle Bill can set us on the right track to address this issue.

In 2020, Massachusetts committed to reducing harmful greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 45% (from the 1990 level) by the year 2030. MassDEP's 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan aims to reduce annual waste disposal to 4.0 million tons by 2030 (from a 2018 baseline of 5.7 million

tons) – a 30% reduction. **Significantly, the Solid Waste Master Plan identifies enhancing the state’s Bottle Bill as a key legislative strategy for reducing waste.**

A [new analysis](#) completed by the Container Recycling Institute (CRI) demonstrates that by modernizing the state’s Bottle Bill, Massachusetts would reduce our annual GHG emissions by 182,000 metric tons – the equivalent of removing nearly 40,000 gas-powered cars off the roads each year. CRI reports that this equals 11% of our state’s goal to reduce GHG emissions under the Solid Waste Master Plan.

As Lawmakers, You Can Break The Cycle

According to Greek mythology, Zeus cursed Sisyphus to roll a heavy boulder up a hill in perpetuity as punishment for his hubris. Here in Massachusetts, our communities have been cursed by an endless flood of trash and plastic litter. Plastic Free Mass members and allies feel compelled to clean up our littered beaches and waterways due to a deep commitment to our neighbors and unwavering care for our environment. **But because we can’t break this cycle by ourselves, we are asking for your help.**

From hours of our lives spent on these labors, we know that most of the beverage containers we clean up are not included under our state’s current Bottle Bill. **Updating our Bottle Bill will solve this problem.** As lawmakers, you can break this perpetual cycle and lighten our load. There is no excuse for delay, no time to waste. 2024 is the year for Massachusetts to tackle beverage container pollution at its root. And it won’t cost the state or taxpayers a cent. **It’s not right to expect volunteers to make these continual efforts when a legislative solution is at your fingertips.**

Sincerely yours,

Plastic Free Mass Coalition

Members: Be the Solution to Pollution; Berkshire Zero Waste Initiative; Berkshire Environmental Action Team; Beyond Plastics, Greater Boston; Charles River Watershed Association; Clean Water Action; Climate Reality Project, MA Southcoast; Conservation Law Foundation; Container Recycling Institute; Environmental League of MA; Friends of the Malden River; Just Zero; Metropolitan Area Planning Council; MetroWest Climate Solutions; Mothers Out Front; Ocean River Institute; Oceana; Progressive Democrats of MA; Progressive Massachusetts; Seaside Sustainability; Sheffield Saves; Slingshot; Students for Environmental Action; The Story of Stuff Project; UMass Dartmouth MassPIRG