

MASSPIRG



MASSPIRG's Janet Domenitz joins our canvassers who went door to door this summer, speaking directly with Bay Staters about the need for a Bigger, Better Bottle Bill in Massachusetts. Photo credit: Leise Jones Photography

BEYOND PLASTIC

MASSPIRG calls for a Bigger, Better Bottle Bill

Only 9% of all plastic ever produced has been recycled, meaning the vast majority of it is ending up in landfills, incinerators or as litter in our natural spaces.

When Massachusetts tackled its waste and litter problems with the passage of the MASSPIRG-backed Bottle Bill back in 1982, beer and soda bottles and cans were made of glass or aluminum. But times have changed since the '80s—and the Bottle Bill needs to change with them.

That's why MASSPIRG is calling on lawmakers to support the Bigger, Better Bottle Bill, which would increase the current 5-cent deposit to 10 cents and—just as importantly—update the law to include beverage containers that weren't around 40 years ago, such as bottled water, sports drinks, iced teas and more.

"We know bottle bills work," said MASSPIRG

Executive Director Janet Domenitz. "In Michigan, which has a 10-cent deposit, more than 75% of containers get redeemed and recycled. Massachusetts can be a waste reduction leader once again with the Better Bottle Bill."

The fact is, while Massachusetts has the worst redemption rate in the country, according to a recent report from the policy center Reloop, bottle deposits are the most effective recycling tool we have.

We simply need to update our law to get the rates back up to where they were and to match other states like Michigan and Oregon, which have already modernized their bottle bills. Updating our Bottle Bill would reduce litter, waste, and the costs we pay as taxpayers for disposal and litter cleanup.

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MASSPIRG and The Public Interest Network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.

FALL 2023

Thanks
for making it
all possible

BIGGER, BETTER BOTTLE BILL CONT.



State Rep. Marjorie Decker, chief House sponsor of the Bigger, Better Bottle Bill, briefs the Boston canvass office.

Making your voice heard at the State House

On June 28, the Massachusetts Legislature held a public hearing to consider a number of bills, including H3690/S2104, An Act to Update the Bottle Bill. Many local and state organizations turned out in force to support this legislation, including the Sierra Club, Conservation Law Foundation, League of Women Voters/MA, Massachusetts Municipal Association and the local chapter of Beyond Plastics.

There were testimonials given by experts from international think tanks that do nothing but study recycling, including the Container Recycling Institute and ReLoop North America. At the same time, the worst kind of recycling comes from the beverage industry, which is recycling old arguments in opposition to the bill that have no basis in fact.

While some businesses have seen the light—such as the Massachusetts Package Stores Association, which previously opposed the law but testified in favor in June—others, like the Massachusetts Beverage Association, are stuck in their old ways, claiming that there are “better ways to recycle” without offering a single one.

We look forward to working with the chief sponsors—state Rep. Marjorie Decker and state Sen. Cynthia Creem—and the rest of the legislative body to get this bill over the finish line.

Building support door by door

To make sure our state legislators know there is broad public support for a Bigger, Better Bottle Bill, MASSPIRG canvassers have been knocking on doors all summer to raise awareness and mo-

bilize support about the need to reduce plastic waste.

Building on PIRG’s 50-year legacy of challenging wasteful consumption that harms our health and our planet, talking to our members and the public is a key part of our strategy to win the campaign.

If you would like to add your name in support of the updated bottle bill, visit masspirg.org.

NEWS BRIEFS

KIDS’ HEALTH

We’re making your voice heard on mercury pollution

Mercury is dangerous—it can do serious damage to a child’s developing brain. Yet we still allow it to pour from the smokestacks of coal-fired power plants. And mercury isn’t the only toxic substance being pumped out of coal-fired power plants. Lead, nickel and arsenic are too.

The good news: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed new rules that will cut back on these toxic emissions by about two-thirds—a lifesaving difference for communities in the shadow of fossil fuel plants.

Not everyone is on board with these common-sense measures. Powerful senators are pushing back, so we and other groups in our national network delivered more than 42,900 public comments to the EPA in support of the strongest possible rules to rein in mercury and other toxic pollution.

The best way to cut this kind of toxic pollution out of our lives would be to stop relying on fossil fuels for power at all. But for right now, strengthening toxic pollution standards and reducing the amount of mercury in our air is the best way to protect our health and the health of our children and grandchildren.

HEALTH CARE

New guide helps people avoid, dispute unnecessary medical bills

As health care prices in the United States hit an all-time high and continue to grow, they strain

OUR MISSION

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, PIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposes, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. PIRG’s mission is to deliver persistent, results oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy and fosters responsive democratic government.

NEWS BRIEFS

many personal budgets. More than 100 million people in the country now carry some form of medical debt. While the Biden administration is beginning to address medical debt through regulation on things such as predatory medical credit cards, millions of people need immediate help navigating confusing policies, billing processes and a lack of clear communication with patients.

To help fill this gap, U.S. PIRG Education Fund and Community Catalyst co-authored “Medical Bills: Everything You Need to Know About Your Rights.” The user-friendly guide aims to help any person, either with or without health insurance, to know their rights to avoid unnecessary billing charges, tackle billing errors and handle debt collectors.

“Medical bills are very confusing and knowing how to read them and use your rights can mean saving hundreds or thousands of dollars,” said Patricia Kelmar, senior director of Health Care campaigns for our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund. “The system shouldn’t be and doesn’t need to be this complex. However, it is. We hear from so many people burdened with medical bills, so we want to make sure patients have the information they need.”

You can find the guide at masspirgedfund.org.

TOXIC THREATS

MASSPIRG urges lawmakers to ban PFAS at State House hearing

A broad coalition of public health, consumer, environmental and community organizations, along with academics, scientists and firefighters urged lawmakers to protect public health from toxic poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at a State House hearing in Boston.

Testifying before the legislature’s Joint Committee on Public Health, MASSPIRG urged the committee to act quickly to pass An Act To Protect Massachusetts Public Health From PFAS (S1356/H2197), filed by state Sen. Julian Cyr and state Rep. Kate Hogan. The bill would phase out PFAS in most products, cut industrial discharges of PFAS, and set up a fund to help communities test for and treat PFAS in drinking water, soil and groundwater.

PFAS are nicknamed “forever chemicals” be-



Leise Jones Photography

cause they don’t break down in the environment or in the body. Researchers have linked these chemicals to a host of serious health issues, including cancer.

“The most important part of the bill is that it ‘turns off the tap’ of toxic PFAS by banning its use in almost all products, preventing the problem from getting even worse,” said Deirdre Cummings, legislative director for MASSPIRG.

MASSPIRG Legislative Director Deirdre Cummings speaks about phasing out most uses of toxic PFAS, a class of chemicals harming our health and contaminating our drinking water.

GO PAPERLESS!

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CITIZEN AGENDA • FALL 2023



MASSPIRG and our national network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change. The Public Interest Network operates and supports organizations committed to a shared vision of a better world and a strategic approach to social change.

RIGHT TO REPAIR

Report highlights Chromebook waste in schools

Remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic pushed schools to provide their students with their own devices, often low-cost Chromebooks. Now, many of these Chromebooks are failing, according to “Chromebook Churn,” an April 18 report by our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund.

Here’s the problem: Chromebooks have a built-in “death date,” after which software support ends. Once laptops “expire,” they no longer receive updates from Google and can’t access secure websites. For example, expired laptops can’t access online state testing websites. The upshot: Schools have piles of Chromebooks that aren’t broken, but are now e-waste.

“We can’t afford to stay on the disposability treadmill,” said Lucas Gutterman, the author of the report and the



Lucas Gutterman, *Designed to Last* campaign director with PIRG, speaking in front of Google’s offices.

Liam Louis, Elle Vignette Photography

director of U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s *Designed to Last* campaign.

“For the sake of Americans’ wallets and America’s environment, tech devices should last longer. Google can lead the way by slowing down the ‘Chromebook churn.’”

FEATURED STAFF



Kimball Nelson

Janet Domenitz: *Janet has been the executive director of MASSPIRG since 1990 and directs programs on consumer protection, solid waste reduction and recycling, health and safety, public transportation, and voter participation. She also serves as vice president for the Consumer Federation of America. Janet helped pass the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act, which was the only U.S. policy to be shortlisted for the international Future Policy Award 2021.*

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