

Testimony before the House Committee on Revenue
Submitted by Steve Gibbs, Vice President of Government Affairs, Columbia Distributing

RE: Opposition to HB 3940 / Support for the -2 Amendment

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Walters, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 3940. My name is Steve Gibbs, and I serve as Vice President of Government Affairs for Columbia Distributing. We are a total beverage distributor based in Oregon, employing over 1,400 Oregonians and delivering beer, wine, cider, spirits, and non-alcoholic beverages to retailers across the state.

Let me begin by stating unequivocally that we support Oregon's commitment to combating wildfires. As a company with employees and customers across every part of the state, we have seen firsthand the growing toll of wildfire damage. We agree that reliable and sustainable funding is needed for wildfire suppression and mitigation.

However, Columbia Distributing strongly opposes the use of Oregon's Bottle Bill as a funding mechanism, as currently proposed in HB 3940. This approach undermines one of Oregon's most successful and trusted environmental programs. We urge this committee to adopt the -2 amendment, which would remove the proposed 5-cent surcharge on beverage containers from the bill.

Oregon's Bottle Bill is widely regarded as the most effective container redemption system in the country. It operates without taxpayer funding and delivers remarkable results—more than two billion containers were redeemed in 2024, with a preliminary redemption rate of 90.4%. These outcomes are only possible because the system maintains a simple, transparent promise: consumers pay a deposit, and they get it back when they return the container. Adding a surcharge on top of the current 10-cent deposit—especially for unrelated purposes—violates that trust.

As OBRC outlined in their written testimony, the redemption system is privately funded through distributor fees and the reinvestment of unclaimed deposits into account benefits, infrastructure, and nonprofit support programs. Eroding this funding model jeopardizes innovations like BottleDrop accounts, the Green Bag program, charitable donations through BottleDrop Give, and even the ability for Oregonians to save for college through their redemptions—something no other state offers.

Undermining this program for a short-term funding mechanism would create long-term damage. It risks lowering redemption rates, weakening Oregon's recycling outcomes, and placing an unnecessary cost burden on consumers already facing rising grocery prices.

I also want to draw your attention to the bipartisan letter submitted to this committee, signed by members from both sides of the aisle, making it clear: wildfire funding is important, but the Bottle Bill is not the right vehicle. The letter strongly urges you to adopt the -2 amendment and reject any proposal that ties the Bottle Bill—either through a new surcharge or a share of the existing deposit—to unrelated expenditures.

In closing, we respectfully request that you support the -2 amendment and remove the Bottle Bill from HB 3940. Let's continue to work together to find meaningful and equitable wildfire funding solutions—without compromising the success of a nationally recognized environmental achievement.

Thank you for your time and consideration.