We applaud EOEEA Secretary Rick Sullivan’s proposed regulations to increase the bottle bill handling fee. Bottle redemption centers, small family-owned businesses that are a key part of making the bottle bill work, haven’t had a raise in the 2.25 cent handling fee for over 20 years. As a result, many of these small businesses have been forced to close.

The handling fee has nothing to do with the 5-cent deposit paid by and returned to consumers when they purchase beverages under the Bottle Bill. The handling fee is what the bottling industry pays redemption centers, grocery stores, and other businesses for collecting and transporting bottles and cans for recycling. Somehow, the bottlers have gotten away with paying the same fee to the recycling handlers for over 20 years, in contrast to the huge increase in the beverage prices they’ve charged consumers since then.

We anticipate the bottling industry will try to scare the public with claims that this one penny increase in the recycling handling fee will result in higher prices to consumers. Whatever the bottlers say about this proposal to raise their handling fee, the facts are important: Consumers in the New England states that don’t have deposit laws at all (NH and RI) pay the same or higher prices for beverages that Massachusetts and other deposit law states (VT, ME, CT) pay. When the handling fee for bottlers goes from 2.25 cents to 3.25 cents as we hope it does soon, consumers’ prices should not change. Thanks to a recent study by the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection, we know that all claims about bottle bills making beverages more expensive are false. Visit here to see the study: http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/bottleca.htm. The handling fee is part of what makes this successful law work, and raising the handling fee one penny is a small price for bottlers to pay for the cost of recycling the 3.3 billion bottles that the industry produces and profits from.

We hope that Secretary Sullivan’s proposal, a welcome and necessary one, will give even more momentum to our coalition’s effort to pass an update to the Bottle Bill in the legislature. Containers without the 5 cent deposit, like water, sports drinks, vitamin beverages and iced teas, are becoming more popular, and creating more litter on our ballfields, in our parks, and at our beaches. Updating the bottle bill, which would get that 5 cent deposit on these everyday beverages, would reduce litter, increase recycling, and save cities and towns money in litter pick up and disposal costs.