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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Smart Container Act Isn't Really So Smart

*More questions than answers stemming from Monday's committee hearing;
Do you want clerks handling garbage and then touching your food and drink items?
Proposal would burden small business owners, deprive municipalities of recycling revenue*

Sal Risalvato, Executive Director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience, Automotive Association (NJGCA), released the following statement in response to the introduction of the Smart Container Act in the New Jersey General Assembly:

"Recycling is great. It helps save the environment, and in its current form, it generates much-needed revenue for municipalities. Imagine what it would look like if people started bringing their aluminum cans and glass and plastic bottles into their local convenience stores, in exchange for the return of their deposit -- a deposit that the state actually hopes they will never retrieve because it is earmarked for a lead abatement program in Newark."

"Already, I have about a million questions," Risalvato continued. "Let's start with the idea of putting each deposit toward a lead abatement fund in Newark. If each person brings their recyclables back to a convenience store and receives their deposit back, there's no money for lead abatement in Newark! But Small Businesses will be burdened. There's also a decline in revenue being generated by the municipalities, which, as we all know, will lead to higher property taxes. But Small Businesses will be burdened. Finally, there is an influx of unsanitary recyclables into the stores that we patronize for our morning coffee and donut, a sandwich for lunch, or an afternoon snack. And Small Businesses will be burdened."

"Imagine that the person in front of you in line has a bunch of bottles and cans to return. The clerk must scan each item in order to provide the appropriate refund. This entails taking each dirty can or bottle from the customer's bag or crate, and transferring them into whatever bins or collection area the convenience store is using to store the items until they can be properly recycled. Once the clerk has completed this effort, and has returned the customer's deposit, the clerk then presumably moves

on to completing your transaction and handling your items. Does the clerk stop, leave the register, and go to the bathroom to wash their hands before helping you?" Risalvato asks. "This does not scream 'convenience' to me, but there's no way I want that clerk touching my items after rifling through a bag full of garbage... So, does the convenience store owner hire an employee dedicated just to perform the task of collecting recyclables and providing refunds? Surely, customers running into the store for a quick coffee and newspaper don't want to wait in line behind someone with a bunch of bottles and cans to return and be processed. *The point of convenience stores is convenience!*"

"And really, why isn't the word SANITARY popping in to everyone's head like a light bulb illuminating? This proposal burdens small business owners and consumers alike. Furthermore, as a recycling center, the store owner must receive bottles and cans into the location, store them in a place where they will not contaminate food or attract bugs or vermin, and then ensure that they get properly recycled. The store owner then must also go through the process of completing the appropriate State forms so that they are refunded for the amount of deposits that they returned to their customers. It seems like an awful lot of paperwork, book keeping, and administration to me," Risalvato said.

"I can only hope that as this proposal continues to receive the scrutiny that it deserves as it makes its way through the legislative process. The plan that has been set forth is not viable from a common sense perspective; it is a burden on small business owners and a nuisance for consumers. Now, as I said before, I believe that recycling is great and I also understand the desire to fund lead abatement programs in Newark. However, this proposal cannot do both! If consumers begin to recycle 100% because now that they have some skin in the game and want to get their deposits back, then no money will remain in the fund for lead abatement. The success of this lead abatement program is built on the assumption that consumers will NOT recycle, and the unclaimed deposits will then be transferred to the Fund. So which one is it?" Risalvato questioned

Presently residents are required to sort recyclables from their trash and leave them at the curb for collection. All indications are that this works successfully in every community. In fact municipal governments have included the expected revenues from selling recyclables in their annual budgets. What happens when municipalities lose revenue because residents choose to cash in recyclables on their own? Will property taxes increase? Probably property taxes will increase, because what other answer is there to that question? Stop burdening my members with nonsensical feel good legislation, Risalvato concluded.

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