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**THE LEAGUE
OF WOMEN VOTERS**
of New York State

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
THE BIGGER BETTER BOTTLE BILL
HEARING ROOM 124/CAPITOL
MARCH 4, 2009**

Good afternoon Senator Thompson and members of the Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation. Thank you for inviting the League of Women Voters of New York State (League) to testify before your committee. My name is Barbara Bartoletti and I am Legislative Director of the League. Roberta Wiernik, our Natural Resources Specialist, participating in preparing this testimony.

The League of Women Voters is a multi-issue, nonpartisan political organization working to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government. The League has over fifty local Leagues statewide.

As early as 1958, the League of Women Voters has been concerned about the recycling of solid waste. Starting in the late 1970s the League became one of the lead organizations lobbying for the passage of the original Bottle Bill. League members walked the state west from Buffalo to Albany and east from Shelter Island to Albany. After an expansive eight year campaign the Bottle Bill passed in 1982 and was a huge League legislative success. Since that time, litter in New York State has declined by 30%.

Fast forward to a new century with a whole new set of solid waste problems. We now have plastic water bottles which are extraordinary prolific, everyone seems to be carrying one. We have ice tea, fruit juice drinks such as Snapple, flavored water, sports drinks; all of these now litter our roadways, parks and beaches.

Starting in the 2003 legislative session, the League, along with several environmental groups began a lobbying campaign to pass a new "Bigger Better Bottle Bill." Today, more than 3 billion non-carbonated

beverage bottles and cans end up in the trash or polluting our state's roadways, parks, and beaches each year because there is no incentive to return them to supermarkets or recycling centers. Currently, beverage companies are keeping an estimated 140 million dollars a year in unclaimed deposits from bottles and cans that are not returned. The unclaimed deposits from an expanded bottle bill could exceed 218 million dollars a year. New York is currently out of step with many other states, which require beverage companies to return unclaimed bottle deposits to benefit the public.

According to a New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) survey, 70% of registered voters favored a BBBB, and 86% favored returning unclaimed deposits to the state for environmental programs. Bottle bill opponents frequently claim that the bottle bill is obsolete now that New York State requires communities to develop residential recycling programs. This survey also found that 81% of registered voters agreed that "curbside recycling is not enough: we need the bottle-deposit program to control litter." Support for these reforms was strong across all measured subgroups, including low-income consumers and those who purchase the most non-carbonated beverages.

The unclaimed deposits, estimated at 258 million dollars, will be a continuing source of revenue for the Environmental Protection Fund that supports projects such as open space and farmland preservation, local waste management programs, parks and recreation, pollution prevention, and historic sites preservation to mention only a few. In addition, in these difficult economic times, the BBBB would provide impetus to already struggling community programs to increase their funding by cleaning up their local communities.

The League of Women Voters of New York State believes that the BBBB should be included in Governor David Paterson's Executive Budget Proposal not only to expand on an already successful litter reduction program, but to provide a revenue stream for the Environmental Protection Fund. The League also believes that responsible government should promote the conservation of and development of natural resources in the public interest. We encourage you to do so in this 2009-2010 Budget.