

My name is Kristofer Brown and I am writing on behalf of Ground Score Association, which operates The People's Depot. This testimonial is to show my support for SB992, which will authorize the OLCC to approve one more alternative redemption centers for convenience zones. I spoke in person at the SB992 public hearing on 05/08/2025 but there wasn't time to say everything that needs to be said about The People's Depot and the situation of canners in Portland

First I want to say that we are deeply grateful to the OBRC for believing in us. They have funded the majority of our operations since our inception and we would not exist today without their support. The People's Depot has required funding increases every year and the OBRC have been very accommodating to us while Ground Score Association develops this program into what it is today. We are thankful for this partnership and for sponsoring this bill. We are also thankful to the Northwest Grocers Association for recognizing the positive impact we have had on nearby retailers and also sponsoring this bill. SB992 will help relieve the increasing costs of our growing redemption program and we grow our customer base.

Since becoming manager of The People's Depot, I'm learning how polarizing The Oregon Bottle Bill is. I've read all too many times that The Oregon Bottle Bill is responsible for the fentanyl crisis, but as someone who works and employs canners on a daily basis I've learned that this claim is not true. The TPD operational staff is made up entirely of canners who had barriers to employment prior to working with The People's Depot. These barriers include lack of identification, being homeless, or not knowing how to open a bank account to receive direct deposit payments. We are proud to say we have maintained over a 90% employment retention rate. We have learned that if we provide decent work, wages, respect and community, that canners will want to transition from collecting bottles and cans for income to formal benefitted work with us. The majority of our staff now has housing, bank accounts, paid time off, sick leave, and most importantly a consistent paycheck to invest in themselves with. If the claim that The Oregon Bottle Bill is what is fueling the fentanyl crisis is true then we wouldn't be as successful as we are as a bottle redemption program. SB992 will allow us to continue to advocate for canners by providing even more pathways to formal work within The Oregon Bottle Bill. Furthermore, in a recent survey of our customers, most canners who frequent our depot have been canning for an average of ten years, since long before fentanyl hit the streets of Portland.

Thanks to funding from OBRC, Ground Score Association recently conducted a 150 person survey at The People's Depot that aimed to show who canners are and what they spend their money on. This has been significant as claims substantiated against canners usually don't have any data to support their claims. There is very little data on canners and waste pickers to begin with and we wanted to change that. The People's Depot considers itself canner and waste picker advocates and the best way to advocate on their behalf is to have meaningful data to present to the public. Ground Score Association and The People's Depot understand the importance of canners and waste pickers in our growing urban environments and we will always step up to defend their work. We are one of the few organizations that aims to challenge some of the commonly held stereotypes about canners. The People's Depot is not defending drug addiction in any form; we are advocating the fact that the majority of people who collect bottles

and cans for income are using that money to buy basic needs. Our survey, along with the 2023 survey taken in New York City, show that the majority of people who collect bottles and cans for income are over the age of 50 and experience mental and physical disabilities that prevent them from joining the workforce. Attached to this testimony is Ground Score Association's stance on drugs and deposits. We will continue to survey our customers to understand how to best support them both in terms of economic beads and other resources. Because The People's Depot is run by and for canners, we are well positioned to provide additional support and resources to canners, including to those few canners who are struggling with drug addiction

The People's Depot understands that there is a fentanyl crisis in Portland that is affecting residents and businesses. We are already working with partners such as neighborhood associations, the Portland Police Bureau, and other resource providers in order to combat this issue and be responsive to our entire community. Ground Score Association and The People's Depot are dedicated to being good neighbors and are always open to dialogue on how to improve our community's relationship and response to people struggling with addiction. The old saying "it takes a village" couldn't be more true when it comes to The People's Depot and we are truly grateful for everyone involved.

Thank you,
Kristofer Brown
TPD Operational Manager

As homelessness and drug use rise across the US and Canada, more attention has turned to the economies of people experiencing homelessness and addiction, including the collection of cans and bottles for income- or canning. Some argue that Deposit Return Systems (DRS) fuel drug use by financing the purchase of drugs. While some people do use can/bottle deposit income for drugs, **there is no evidence that Deposit Return Systems increase or even enable drug use.**

Drug-related mortality rates are lower in Oregon than they are in many states, like Washington, without Deposit Return Systems¹. Looking at the [CDC data on drug overdose mortality](#) by state, it's clear that Bottle Bills and drug overdoses are not correlated. While two states (Maine and Vermont) with bottle bills are represented in those with the top ten highest overdose-related death rates, two (Maine and Iowa) are represented among the ten states with the lowest overdose-related death rates.

While canning is underfunded and overlooked in research- a data justice issue- those studies that do exist counter conventional stereotypes about canners:

Addiction is a serious condition that cannot be treated by cutting off one's income source. Income restrictions are more likely to make a person engage in more dangerous behaviors to buy or exchange for drugs. Petty crime rates in states with bottle bills are 11% lower than in states without².

Canning helps. Employment is shown to help people overcome addiction³. In surveys in New York and Portland, canners frequently cite the physical and mental health benefits⁴ of collecting cans and bottles, feeling financially autonomous, providing for themselves and others, and paying for basic needs. A 2021 study in Montreal showed that most canning income serves as an alternative or supplement to social assistance⁵.

A 2023 study⁶ on canners in New York last year showed that most are housed, and that most canners face barriers to alternative employment due to physical or mental health issues, and that the vast majority spend their canning income on food, other basic needs, household expenses and family/community support. Most canners are above the age of 50. In studies from both New York and Portland⁷, canners on average earn less than \$5/hour collecting and redeeming beverage containers.

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/drug_poisoning_mortality/drug_poisoning.htm

² [Ashenmiller 2012](#)

³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1533256X.2016.1235429?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

⁴ Noleen R. Chikowore * and John M. Kerr. 2020. Qualitative Inquiry into Collecting Recyclable Cans and Bottles as a Livelihood Activity at Football Tailgates in the United States

⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349379482_Informal_collection_of_beverage_containers_in_Montreal_and_the_Coop_Les_Valoristes_A_rapid_socio-economic_livelihoods_assessment

⁶ Harvey, Jenna; Hegel, Christine and Chris Hartmann. 2023. [Independent Recyclers in New York City: Sector profile and pathways to inclusion.](#)

⁷ https://www.groundscoreassociation.org/_files/ugd/5fdef8_2d66d9cf9ed34fa5b803688595a8c395.pdf