



MAINE PRESS ASSOCIATION  
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Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Judith Meyer. I am the editor of the Sun Journal in Lewiston, the Kennebec Journal and the Morning Sentinel.

I write on behalf of the Maine Press Association in opposition to LD 1550, An Act to Authorize the Expungement of Records of Nonviolent Crimes.

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When the Criminal Records Review Committee was formed and convened in 2021, on which a representative of the Maine Press Association served, we were tasked with coming forward with a recommendation on what criminal records, if any, might qualify for expungement.

The committee – which included more than two dozen stakeholders in law enforcement, prison reform, public access, victim advocacy groups and other interested parties -- met for months and came forward with a number of recommendations, but could not settle the question of how expungement might work in Maine, or whether there may be options other than expungement to seal certain records. Throughout these conversations, there was great unease about expunging felony-level crimes, including Class C crimes, which are included in the bill before you.

Class C crimes in Maine, punishable by up to five years in prison and \$5,000 in fines, include aggravated operating under the influence, felony theft, and aggravated criminal mischief, among other significant crimes, like assault (not nonviolent). It is also important to recognize that a Class C felony conviction can be, and often is, the result of a plea agreement in which a defendant pleads down from a higher-level felony.

There are certain Class B level crimes that, while misdemeanors, involve violence, including aggravated assault with a dangerous weapon that results in bodily injury. Criminal threatening and terrorizing are also both Class B crimes.

There was robust debate surrounding these and other issues, including whether expungement should be crime-specific rather than crime classification specific, and while there was some agreement on some issues and members of the Criminal Records Review Committee were making progress on a recommendation, we did not have time to complete our research and make a recommendation in the time allotted for our work.

Given the amount of research that has already been gathered and the level of discussion that has already been held on this concept by members of the Criminal Records Review Committee, the Maine Press Association opposes this bill and requests that Judiciary move further discussion back to a reconstituted Criminal Records Review Committee for recommendation.

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The Maine Press Association (MPA), founded in 1864, is one of the oldest professional news organizations in the nation. Our goals, as spelled out in our charter and by-laws are to promote and foster high ethical standards and the best interests of the newspapers, journalists, and media organizations of the state of Maine that constitute its membership; to encourage improved business and editorial practices and better media environment in the state; and to improve the conditions of journalism and journalists by promoting and protecting the principles of freedom of speech and of the press and the public's right to know.