

Testimony in support of LD 421
the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
April 7, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in support of LD 421, An Act to Eliminate Barriers to Reentry into the Community After Incarceration by Repealing Certain Driver's License Suspension Provisions.

Eliminating barriers to reentry is in the interest of public safety and community well being.

Maine is not a state with exceptional public transportation. We are a rural state and often have harsh weather. People are unable to attain and retain employment, seek needed support services, or support their children and families by simply grocery shopping or attending a parent-teacher meeting without transportation. Relying on family and friends for reliable transportation is not a viable option for any period of time. License suspensions are punitive and an unnecessary additional sentence.

A Prison Policy Initiative report: "Reinstating Common Sense:

[How driver's license suspensions for drug offenses unrelated to driving are falling out of favor](#) " reminds us why these types of restrictions came about, and how it is in all of our best interest to remove them.

"In 1991, at the height of the War on Drugs, Congress introduced a new punishment for drug crimes. A new law threatened states with reduced highway funding if states did not begin automatically suspending the driver's license of anyone convicted of a drug offense. In response, many states passed laws that added at least six months of license suspension on top of existing criminal penalties.

At the very time people should be finding stable housing, securing employment, and reconnecting with their communities, drug-related license suspension laws remove a critical avenue to success.

86% of Americans use a motor vehicle in order to reach their place of employment. Employers routinely require proof that individuals have a valid driver's license in order to even be considered for a job.

*Valid licenses imply that an individual has a reliable means of getting to and from work. Job applications are routinely dismissed because applicants have a suspended license and cannot legally drive. **For an employer, a license suspension implies risky, reckless and irresponsible behavior—even if the license was suspended for non-driving reasons.***

Finding employment and earning a legal income, research shows, is key for people trying to stay out of the criminal justice system.

*Finding housing can prove difficult with a suspended driver's license. While landlords cannot legally discriminate against people because of their race or religion, individuals with suspended licenses are disadvantaged. Many landlords request driver's license numbers or a scanned copy of a driver's license. This information can be used to confirm someone's identity but also **can be used to acquire driving records and criminal histories.** While people are protected from employers and landlords accessing their*

*driving records without consent, **many give consent reluctantly, believing it's required because the information is requested on applications.***

Our criminal justice system should not set people up to fail. Yet that is exactly what mandatory driver's license suspensions do: they introduce new legal, economic, and social barriers for people who are in the midst of reentry. “

As someone who comfortably drives to and from work every day, and often in the dark for either or both times, I am often in fear for the safety of those I see riding bikes in all weather on roads that have uneven edges at best, no street lights and plenty of pavement issues. I applaud those who choose this mode of transportation for environmental or other reasons. For those who do not have a choice and are risking their life to get to work on time to support their family and stay out of jail and prison I am in fear, and I think shame-on-us.

I hope you will support LD421.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson

Sanford, Maine.

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/driving/national.html>