

Niki Merrill  
Portland  
LD 1911

testimony in Support of LD 1911 — Clean Slate Bill

Good morning, members of the committee.

My name is Niki Merrill, and I am here in strong support of LD 1911, the Clean Slate bill.

I work as an MDOC Recovery Program Coordinator at Portland Recovery Community Center, training and supporting recovery coaches inside the Department of Corrections and in community settings. My work is deeply personal — it is grounded in my own lived experience and in my family's experience, particularly my brother's.

My brother has been in and out of prison for more than 20 years. The trauma he experienced during his time in Maine State Prison has followed him long after his release. Even when he has done what was asked of him, his criminal record has prevented him from securing stable, gainful employment; that inability to work has deeply affected his sense of self-worth, fueled hopelessness, and contributed to continued substance use and instability.

The consequences have extended far beyond him. As a family, we have lost my nieces — his daughters — to the system. This is what happens when barriers to employment, housing, and dignity pile on top of trauma and attempted recovery instead of allowing people a genuine chance to rebuild.

This story is not unique. Research consistently shows that employment is one of the strongest predictors of successful reentry. People who are unable to find work after release are far more likely to return to prison, while those who secure and maintain employment significantly reduce their likelihood of recidivism. When we block access to work, we undermine recovery and public safety at the same time.

LD 1911 does not erase accountability. It recognizes growth. By sealing eligible records after a period of law-abiding behavior, Clean Slate removes barriers that no longer serve public safety and allows people to move forward.

This bill has the power to interrupt cycles that harm not just individuals, but entire families. Clean Slate is about giving people — and their children — a real chance to move forward. I respectfully urge you to support LD 1911. Thank you for your time and attention.