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**Testimony
Before the Maine House of Representatives
Joint Judiciary Committees**

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***Public Hearing on LD 1911: An Act to Automatically Seal Criminal History Record
Information for Certain Crimes***

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and**

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Chairwoman Carney, Chairwoman Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the societal benefits of sealing low-level criminal records. I appreciate your convening this hearing.

My name is Patrick Purtill. I am the Executive Vice President & General Counsel of Unify.US, a nonprofit organization that brings together faith-driven and economic conservatives to find common-sense solutions to some of today's most pressing problems. Our work focuses on three broad issue sets: economic opportunity; families & communities; and, freedom & justice. And our work covers federal as well as state level policies. In addition to my work at Unify.US, I am the Charles Evans Hughes Lecturer in Political Science at Colgate University.

I have spent a good deal of my career working in the field of criminal justice policy. As Special Assistant to the Deputy Attorney General at the U.S. Justice Department, I served on the Attorney General's Prisoner Reentry Working Group, President Bush's Prisoner Reentry Initiative Group, and the Strategic Management Council's Subcommittee on Violent Crime and Gangs. I have also served in the office of United States Attorney for the District of South Carolina, as a clerk to a federal judge, and as an advocate for policies that increase public safety.

I want to thank you for considering LD 1911. This legislation will reduce recidivism, increase employment, strengthen families and communities, and provide a pathway to redemption for those who have demonstrated they want to reform their lives.

No one would deny that crime should be punished; but punishment should not continue in perpetuity. Those who have paid their debt to society for low-level or non-violent offenses and who have reformed their lives deserve to be given a second chance and fully welcomed back into society. Rehabilitation is the goal of the criminal justice system. We want offenders to pay their debts and to amend their lives. Those who do, should be recognized, and restored to society—for their good, their families' benefit, and for the betterment of our communities.

Why is record sealing so important? The answer is that it promotes public safety by increasing and improving employment for people with criminal records, which is one in four Mainers. Meaningful work is the surest route to successfully re-enter society, support your family, and remain law abiding. And as many states are experiencing, workforce shortages are leading to decreased productivity and output resulting in lower economic growth.

LD 1911 does two important things to improve Maine's current laws.

First, it modernizes Maine's procedures to simply automate the process of sealing low-level criminal records. Many states allow individuals to petition the courts to have their records sealed. The problem is that the process consumes valuable judicial resources and can be expensive, time consuming, and intimidating. Automating this process rewards staying crime-free after release and gets more people into the workforce.

Many states have already successfully implemented these policies including Pennsylvania (2018) and its expansions in 2023 and 2024, as well as Virginia, Utah, Michigan, Oklahoma, Connecticut and Colorado, to name a few. We expect this number to continue to grow in the next few years and would urge Maine to be next on this list.

Secondly, LD 1911 requires that people must demonstrate their rehabilitation by remaining crime free for 5-15 years based on the nature of their conviction. This requirement ensures that record sealing is not a gift but is a recognition that the person has complied with all aspects of their incarceration and/or supervision and have successfully reintegrated into society. Also, LD 1911 would seal the records of persons who were arrested but never convicted or who were acquitted. In the modern world where job applicants are screened by algorithms and not people, someone who was never convicted or was acquitted of a crime should not be screened out of job opportunities by having to disclose this information.

Finally, it is important to remember that law enforcement will still be able to see these records. This bill simply limits the public disclosure of low-level convictions after a long period of law-abiding behavior has demonstrated rehabilitation.

The practical, real-world benefits of record sealing are well documented. It:

- Increases the workforce, including many skilled workers.
- Increases Employment opportunities with better wages and benefits.
- Leads to Stronger credit ratings.
- Better and Safer housing options.
- More stable families and safer communities.
- Significant incentives to remain crime-free.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your thoughtful consideration.

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