

Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 1911:

An Act to Automatically Seal Criminal History Record Information for Certain Crimes

January 08, 2026

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary – And special thanks to you, Senator Talbot Ross, for sponsoring this essential bill.

My name is Lacey Sawyer. I am the President of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. I am a resident of Presque Isle, Aroostook County, Maine. I am here in **strong support of LD 1911.**

One in four adult Mainers have a criminal record. 25% of our potential workforce that is limited to, and/or locked out of reaching their potential - their potential to contribute to society; to find purpose through meaningful work, and to support themselves and their families. A prior conviction cuts a job seeker's chances of getting a callback or job offer by *nearly HALF*. Whole families and whole communities suffer even *after* people have demonstrated meaningful change. They continue facing barriers in accessing stable employment, housing, educational and career opportunities. The barriers persist long after people have "*done their time*" because the criminal record requires people to "*pay for their crime*" – forever, with their dignity and worth.

As a clinical social worker and alcohol and drug counselor, I have witnessed this heartbreak reality time and time again. People have done everything to redeem themselves and many have gone above and beyond with a restored sense of hope. They've met the legal system's requirements, made amends and done everything in their power to open doors that only remain locked. The doors of housing, closed. The doors of employment, shut. The doors of higher education higher education, sealed. It's like a jail – outside of the jail. It feels incredibly demoralizing and dehumanizing. It stalls motivation, momentum and progress. It is heartbreak because despite pounding the door to be let back in, people are shut out in the cold disconnection of rejection. This is heartbreak because this is when shame cycles resurface and old patterns repeat. This is the *most* heartbreak *because those very same people are some of the brightest, wisest, most empathetic, kind, compassionate, respectful and capable people I know*. People who make excellent tenants, employees and students. When given the chance, they do not take this for granted. They have tremendous gratitude for new opportunities.

I am one of "*those people*". I live with a non-conviction record. I also have a master's degree, multiple professional licenses and privilege. I've held steady employment, supported my family, and paid my taxes. And despite decades gone, my past continues to follow me. Every time I apply for a new job or professional license, I must disclose that record and humiliatingly explain the same mistake repeatedly.

Maine, and specifically Aroostook County, has an aging population, aging workforce and some of the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the state. Aroostook County also has disproportionately high rates of justice impacted people. All this – despite a low population. The lack of stable housing, transportation, economic stability, and healthcare services; coupled with isolation, limited opportunity and a criminal record – all contribute to increased crime and recidivism. Research validates that ***employment***,

housing and education are directly correlated to reducing crime and recidivism while increasing positive health outcomes. Elected officials have the power to make a significant difference. Instead of relegating people to forever *Second-Class* status, you have the power to restore dignity, worth, social, economic, and racial justice with a *Second Chance*, a Clean Slate.

In 2022, the Legislature created a process to allow people to petition the courts to seal certain misdemeanor records. While with good intentions, the reality is that the system does not work well for most Mainers. The process is confusing, time-consuming, and intimidating. Many people don't know they are eligible or that this avenue even exists. Others struggle to navigate the required process and can't afford an attorney to help them through it. The result is, in theory, the petition based sealing process exists, but it does not translate into real life experience.

LD 1911 would break down those barriers and expand relief for those that have earned a *Second Chance*. It does not erase records or compromise public safety. As we know, employment, housing and education are all directly correlated with reducing crime. Maine values self-reliance and strong community ties. LD 1911 reflects those values perfectly. NASW Maine and I urge you to vote "**ought to pass**" and restore dignity and worth, while promoting racial, economic and social justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
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President, NASW Maine