

Testimony in support of LD 1922 - An Act to Support Workforce Development for Families That Were Involved in Child Protective Activities by Requiring the Sealing of Certain Records

Good morning Senator Ingwersen Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Courtney Meade, and I am from Bucksport, Maine. I am writing in strong support of LD 1922 as a parent whose life was deeply shaped by involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS).

My substance use began long before I became a mother. It developed in the context of unresolved trauma and survival patterns I did not yet have the tools to understand. For much of my life, I believed that my worth depended on keeping the peace, minimizing my own needs, and carrying pain quietly.

When I became a parent, I desperately wanted to do better than what I had known. But addiction does not disappear simply because someone loves their children. Over time, my untreated substance use created instability and caused harm within my family.

On February 17th, 2023, CPS became involved. That moment forced me to confront the impact of my addiction and the reality that change was no longer optional. It was one of the most painful moments of my life, and also the moment I chose to take full responsibility and do something different.

I did not know whether following every requirement would lead to reunification, but I knew that if I did not try, it never would — and that was something I could not live with.

From that moment forward, I committed myself fully to recovery and to rebuilding my life. I completed an intensive outpatient treatment program and continued with ongoing mental health and substance use treatment in an outpatient setting, where I remain engaged today. I also participated in and helped facilitate peer support groups for survivors of domestic violence and completed trauma-informed, recovery-based parenting and co-parenting education. At the same time, I made sure my children received the support they needed by securing therapeutic services for my older child and advocating for early evaluation and appropriate school-based supports for my younger child as he entered kindergarten.

Since then, I have graduated from the University of Maine at Augusta with my bachelor's degree in Mental Health and Human Services, earned my Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Technician Certificate, and became a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CADC). I chose this path because I wanted to give back to families walking the same road I once did.

During my internship with Wellspring, a nonprofit substance use treatment provider based in Bangor, I gained experience in outpatient treatment, detox, drug court, and the men's recovery

residence. However, I was unable to enter Infinity House, a long-term residential program serving women and children, due solely to my prior involvement with CPS. As a mother in recovery, it was the one place where I felt I could have offered the deepest understanding and support, yet I was barred from even stepping inside.

These restrictions extend beyond my professional life. Because of my prior involvement with CPS, I am unable to volunteer at my son's school or chaperone field trips. These moments, which many parents take for granted, remind me that no matter how much I have changed, my past still follows me into spaces where I simply want to show up as a mom.

I went above and beyond what was required of me. I did not simply comply with the system; I committed myself fully to healing, accountability, and change, and I continue to build on that growth each day. Yet, I continue to be defined by the worst moment of my life, even after years of sustained recovery and stability.

Even when applying for positions that do not involve working with children, employers are required to complete formal waivers on my behalf. This often requires me to repeatedly disclose the most painful period of my life to people I am just meeting. Each disclosure reopens trauma and reinforces feelings of shame, making me hesitant to apply at all, particularly knowing that if I am not selected, I must relive those moments again.

Looking for employment should not feel like punishment long after accountability has already been taken.

Although I prepared for a clinical career, these ongoing restrictions shaped where I was able to serve. Advocacy has allowed me to continue supporting families and communities impacted by these systems, while using both my education and lived experience to push for solutions that strengthen Maine's workforce and promote long-term stability.

LD 1922 does not erase accountability or minimize harm. It acknowledges that accountability has already occurred, and that healing, responsibility, and growth should mean something.

Recovery should not mean living forever under the weight of your darkest hour. It should mean being allowed to move forward. I respectfully urge the committee to vote to in favor of LD 1922.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information if helpful.

Sincerely,
Courtney Meade
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