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TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

Ought to Pass – LDs 848, 1550, 1646

An Act to Expunge Certain Nonviolent Drug Crimes

An Act to Authorize the Expungement of Records of Nonviolent Crimes

**An Act to Vacate or Adjust Sentences and Expunge Arrests,
Convictions and Adjudications for Cannabis-related Offenses**

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

April 27, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Counsel at the ACLU of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LDs 848, 1550, and 1646 because each bill would free Mainers from the debilitating unintended consequences of criminal records, extending the promise of our constitution to all people in our state.

This is how criminal law was designed to work. The legislature decides that something is a crime and designates consequences for committing the crime. These consequences can include a prison sentence, rehabilitation or mental health services, community service, supervised release, and more. Unfortunately, for as long as there have been criminal laws – but exponentially more in the digital age – these punishments often far outweigh the crime committed. Past convictions can make people ineligible for job opportunities, professional licenses, housing assistance, education, volunteering with their children's activities, and more. In short, a criminal record has prevented millions across the country, and thousands across Maine, from moving on with their lives, pushing them into second-class status even after they completed their sentences. Keeping people from being able to fully reenter and contribute to their communities also makes it more likely they will become entangled in the legal system again.