



Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Judith Meyer. I am the editor of the Sun Journal in Lewiston, the Kennebec Journal and the Morning Sentinel.

I write on behalf of the Maine Press Association in opposition to LD 1789, An Act to Remove All Marijuana-related Provisions from the Maine Criminal Code and Expunge All Convictions Involving Marijuana.

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This testimony will feel familiar as it matches Maine Press Association's position on LD 1646, An Act to Vacate or Adjust Sentences and Expunge Arrests, Convictions and Adjudications for Cannabis-related Offenses.

When the Criminal Records Review Committee was formed and convened in 2021, on which a representative of the Maine Press Association served, we were tasked with coming forward with a recommendation on what criminal records, if any, might qualify for expungement, seal, vacature, pardon or some other method of shielding the record.

Top of the list was sealing or vacating criminal records relating to marijuana convictions, a topic that consumed many of our meetings.

I don't recall that we discussed in any detail the concept of removing all marijuana-related provisions from the Maine Criminal Code (the provision regarding forfeiture of firearms, for example), but we had not been tasked with making such a wide recommendation and focused only on the question of vacature, expungement or sealing such records.

The committee -- which included more than two dozen stakeholders in law enforcement, prison reform, public access, victim advocacy groups and other interested parties -- met for months and came forward with a number of recommendations, but did not settle the question of what marijuana convictions should be sealed/vacated and how. Vacate all marijuana convictions from all time? Just those convictions since marijuana use was legalized in Maine? Some combination of those options? Or, something else entirely?

We invited experts to talk about options, including what other states were doing, and heard from both the Judicial Branch and the Maine State Bureau of Identification, which collects and

maintains criminal history information, about the process of sealing/vacating/expunging tens of thousands of criminal records, and what the cost might be.

There was robust debate surrounding these issues, including how to manage defendants currently serving sentences for marijuana convictions, and while there was some agreement on some issues and members of the Criminal Records Review Committee were making progress on a recommendation for certain marijuana convictions, we did not have time to complete our research and make recommendations in the time allotted for our work.

Given the amount of research that has already been gathered and the level of discussion that has already been held on this concept by members of the Criminal Records Review Committee, the Maine Press Association opposes this bill and requests that Judiciary move further discussion back to a reconstituted Criminal Records Review Committee for recommendation.

I invite the Judiciary Committee to take a peek at the records the Criminal Records Review Committee has amassed on this topic, and the committee work that has already been completed, in hopes you will recognize a great deal of work has already been accomplished in advancing recommendations that will address many of the suggestions in this bill, if the Criminal Records Review Committee is given the time needed to finish up its work.

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The Maine Press Association (MPA), founded in 1864, is one of the oldest professional news organizations in the nation. Our goals, as spelled out in our charter and by-laws are to promote and foster high ethical standards and the best interests of the newspapers, journalists, and media organizations of the state of Maine that constitute its membership; to encourage improved business and editorial practices and better media environment in the state; and to improve the conditions of journalism and journalists by promoting and protecting the principles of freedom of speech and of the press and the public's right to know.