

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony in support of LD 1856 to the Committee on the Judiciary

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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, promoting restorative practices to increase public safety and the health of our communities.

This bill implements a recommendation of the Criminal Records Review Committee and requires the Maine Commission on Public Defense Services to develop a procedure for assisting people to file post-judgment motions to seal their criminal history record information.

As you are well aware, **any criminal conviction is a life sentence**. With recent development of cheap and easy access to criminal records, and the development of “Business Screening Services” making money using them, any criminal record follows a person like a shadow, haunting their efforts to find work, find housing, and even find recreation.

This is particularly tragic when the “crimes” are a result of the person’s own abuse and/or exploitation.

Abuse and exploitation create deep and lasting scars that are also a life sentence. These deep and lasting scars can shape, and sometimes distort, lives and actions—sometimes in criminal behavior.

When that has happened, it is appropriate that we create a process and mechanism for it NOT to be a life sentence.

This bill seeks to provide the assistance and support of Public Defense Services in making that happen.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

We urge you to support it.

Thank you for your generous attention.

I am happy to try to answer any questions.