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Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

January 8, 2026

Testimony in Support of LD 1911: An Act to Automatically Seal Criminal History Record Information for Certain Crimes

To Joint Committee Chairs Senator Anne Carney and Representative Amy Kuhn, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Laura Chavez, and I am the Director of Research and Data at The Clean Slate Initiative - a national non-profit whose mission is to work alongside states to streamline the record-clearing process and ensure it happens automatically. I am writing on behalf of The Clean Slate Initiative to express our strong support for LD 1911, which will address and rectify the impact of past records on individuals and communities.

As of 2019, 271,000 adults in Maine, or 25% of the adult population, have some form of a record, and people of color are disproportionately impacted. In Maine, nearly half of Black adults have a record.[1] Arrest and conviction records present significant barriers to employment, housing, education, and social reintegration. Clean Slate legislation has proven to be an effective tool in addressing these challenges by allowing eligible individuals to have their records automatically sealed, giving them a fresh start.

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[1] See www.cleanslateinitiative.org/data

When implementation is complete, LD 1911 will provide full record clearance to 163,000 adults, or 60% of those with records in the state.[2]

Nationwide, fewer than 10% of people eligible for relief under current petition-based record clearance policies actually receive it because the process is slow, requires jumping through complicated legal hoops, and can be costly for individuals who have been impacted by the legal system.[3] Automatic record sealing simplifies and improves the process to make record clearance accessible to everyone who meets the requirements.

The necessity of automatic record sealing becomes evident when considering the pervasive impact of criminal records. A significant majority of employers (94%)[4], landlords (90%)[5], and educational institutions (72%)[6] conduct background checks, leading to the widespread exclusion of people with records from opportunities to support themselves and their families and improve their lives.

Thirteen states and the District of Columbia have enacted Clean Slate automatic record sealing laws, including New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. The positive impact on individuals and communities has been substantial. Implementing similar legislation in Maine has the potential to significantly bolster public safety and stimulate economic growth.

A recent survey of people with records in Pennsylvania, Utah, and Michigan, which started implementing automatic record sealing in 2019, 2020, and 2023, respectively, indicates that those who have received relief are already experiencing improvements in their lives, particularly in employment. Nearly half (42%) reported improvement in work, employment, personal finances, or public assistance, 35% reported improvement in

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[2] The Clean Slate Initiative. (2024). "Population Estimates to Maximize Policy Impact: The Clean Slate Initiative Methodology for Estimating State Populations with a Record." Available at: cleanslateinitiative.org/data-dashboard.
[3] Chien, Colleen. "America's paper prisons: The second chance gap." *Michigan Law Review* (2020): 519-611.
[4] Nelson, Ariel. "Broken records redux: How errors by criminal background check companies continue to harm consumers seeking jobs and housing." *National Consumer Law Center.* (2019).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Stewart, Robert and Christopher Uggen, "Criminal records and college admissions: A modified experimental audit." *Criminology,* 58(1), 156-188, (2019).

personal and family relationships, and 34% reported improvement in health, mental health, or self-esteem.[7]

Clean Slate policies can transform lives by increasing access to employment, stable housing, education, and community involvement. Research indicates that wages can increase by over 22% in the first year following record clearance.[8]

The consequences of having a record extend beyond the individual to their families and communities. Parents with records face barriers to participating in their children's education and activities, further perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. They often aren't allowed to volunteer in their children's classrooms or chaperone a school field trip. Automatic record clearance can give parents who meet the requirements a second chance to fully show up for their children.

Furthermore, the broader societal and economic impacts of excluding individuals with records from the economy are profound. The U.S. economy loses an estimated $78-87 billion annually due to reduced workforce participation by individuals with records.[9] Research also shows that when people have stable jobs that pay a livable wage, they are much less likely to engage in illegal behavior.[10] By enabling eligible individuals to clear their records automatically, Clean Slate laws not only support personal and familial stability but also contribute to healthier communities and a stronger economy.

The petition-based sealing process is complex and costly, while a state-initiated record sealing process, where records are sealed automatically upon meeting the eligibility criteria, can be more cost-effective and deliver greater economic impact. LD 1911 will streamline the sealing process, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and ensure equitable access to justice for all individuals seeking redemption.

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[7] The Clean Slate Initiative (2024). "The Impacts of Clean Slate Laws in Pennsylvania, Utah, and Michigan." Available at: https://www.cleanslateinitiative.org/2024-yougov-survey-report

[8] Prescott, J. J., and Sonja B. Starr. "Expungement of criminal convictions: An empirical study." *Harv. L. Rev.* 133 (2019): 2460.

[9] Bucknor, Cherrie and Alan Barber. "The price we pay: Economic costs of barriers to employment for former prisoners and people convicted of felonies." *Center for Economic and Policy Research.* (June, 2016).

[10] See LaBriola, Joe. "Post-prison employment quality and future criminal justice contact." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2020): 154-172

The proposed timeline for implementing the law, starting on January 1, 2027, is pragmatic and aligns with the implementation timelines of other states working toward and that have begun automatic record sealing. Maine is particularly well-positioned technologically to implement Clean Slate due to the centralized court system, modern case management systems, and existing automated data workflows.

In summary, The Clean Slate Initiative urges the Committee on Judiciary to support LD 1911, recognizing the positive impact on the lives of individuals seeking redemption and reintegration into society.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Attachment:

- CSI Maine Fact Sheet

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CLEAN SLATE IN MAINE

WHAT ARE CLEAN SLATE POLICIES?

Clean Slate policies allow individuals to have certain arrest or conviction records automatically sealed. These policies offer people who have completed their sentences and remained out of trouble the chance to move forward in their lives without the burden of a record.

Clean Slate policies involve automated or streamlined processes for identifying and sealing eligible records. The specific criteria and procedures may vary depending on the jurisdiction and the nature of the record.
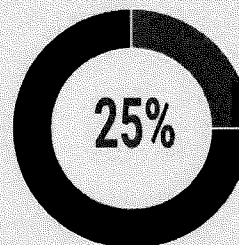
Clean Slate policies primarily aim to tackle the enduring repercussions of a record, which often impede individuals from obtaining employment, finding suitable housing, accessing educational opportunities, and rebuilding their lives. Through record sealing, people are offered a fresh start and face fewer barriers to opportunity due to their past.

CLEAN SLATE'S IMPACT IN MAINE

The Clean Slate Initiative analyzes justice data at the state level, creating impact statements based on each state's specific circumstances.
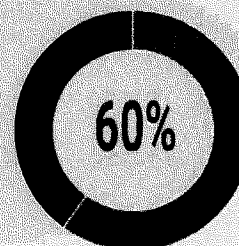
Here are the Clean Slate impacts for Maine:

271,000 adults in Maine have a record.

25%

25% of Maine's total adult population has a record.

163,000 adults with a record in Maine could have their record fully sealed.

60%

60% of adults with a record in Maine could have their record fully sealed.

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This factsheet is prepared by: