



Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Testimony in Support of:

L.D. 1911, An Act to Automatically Seal Criminal History Record Information for Certain Crimes

January 08, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Julia Lester, and I am the Community Engagement and Peer Support Specialist at Western Maine Addiction and Recovery Initiative (WMARI) and The HILLS Recovery Center. We testify today in strong support of LD 1911.

Western Maine has the second largest share of population below the federal poverty level, the second highest rates of food insecurity, the second highest rate of unemployment, the highest rate of people working part time seasonal jobs, and the highest share of people earning less than a living wage.¹ Suffice it to say, in Western Maine, opportunities are limited. There are few employers, fewer housing options, and far fewer second chances. When someone has a criminal record, even a low-level, nonviolent one from years ago, it follows them everywhere because there is nowhere else to go. If you are denied housing in one town, there may not be another option down the road. If you lose a job offer, there may not be another employer willing to give an opportunity.

WMARI was founded over a decade ago by a law enforcement officer frustrated with the way they had been responding to overdose and substance use related calls. Since then we have become a coalition of medical providers, law enforcement, our local school district, faith leaders, recovery centers, behavioral health providers, community non-profits, and small businesses. Each in their own ways and responsibilities has shown a commitment to and investment in our communities to help end the stigmas directly and indirectly associated with substance use disorder.

We work with people who are doing exactly what we ask of them. In many cases, they have completed treatment. They have remained conviction-free for years. They are trying to stabilize their lives, support their families, and contribute to their communities. And yet a single background check can undo months or years of progress as well as making less effective the significant investment made through state grants, Opioid Settlement Fund currently, and federal funding in the past, which have been an instrumental investment in the work of individuals and the community as a whole.

¹ Myall, James. "State of Working Maine 2025: Strengthening Economic Opportunity in Rural Communities and beyond." *MECEP*, 17 Dec. 2025, www.mcep.org/jobs-and-income/state-of-working-maine-2025/.

The barriers created by the current system are not hypothetical for us. We see this play out constantly. We see people offered jobs and housing, only to have those offers pulled at the last minute. We see people stuck in unsafe or unstable living situations because landlords rely heavily on background checks. We see people cycling through short-term work, not because they are unreliable, but because their past continues to disqualify them from long-term stability.

In rural Maine, that instability has ripple effects. When someone cannot secure housing, they are more likely to end up in emergency rooms, jails, or in crisis. When someone cannot access employment, it undermines recovery, family stability, and local workforce needs. These are costs our communities already bear.

The current petition-based record sealing process does not work for the people we serve. It assumes time, money, legal knowledge, and flexibility that many working Mainers simply do not have. The result is that relief exists on paper, but not in practice.

Clean Slate changes that in a way that matters for rural Maine. It ensures that relief is automatic for people who have already demonstrated change over time. It removes unnecessary barriers without compromising public safety. It allows people to move forward based on who they are now, not who they were years ago.

This bill would strengthen rural communities by increasing access to stable housing and employment, reducing recidivism, and helping local employers fill persistent workforce gaps. It would also reduce the strain on emergency services and systems that are already stretched thin in counties like ours.

At WMARI and The HILLS Recovery Center, we believe accountability matters. But so does proportionality. When someone has served their sentence and stayed out of “trouble” for years, continued punishment serves no public benefit. LD 1911 is a practical step toward a system that works for real people in real communities. For Western Maine, it is not just about fairness. It is about stability, health, and keeping our communities whole. We respectfully urge you to vote yes on LD 1911.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Julia Lester