

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 8, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Heide Lester and I am the Deputy Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We strongly support L.D. 1911 because we believe that people and their families should have the chance to move forward with their lives without forever being defined by something in their past.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are more than twice as likely to be arrested as straight people – and lesbian and bisexual women, specifically, are more than four times as likely to be arrested as straight women. LGBTQ+ adults broadly are incarcerated at three times the rate of the total adult population, and their overrepresentation in the carceral system is due to their experiences of high rates of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and violence.<sup>1</sup> In fact, LGBTQ+ people, particularly those who are low-income and/or people of color, are overrepresented in all stages of the criminal justice system, from their high rates of juvenile justice involvement to the long sentences they often receive as adults.<sup>2</sup> Rates are especially high for transgender women of color, who are frequently targeted by police for simply existing in public spaces.<sup>3</sup>

People with records face significant barriers that hinder their ability to thrive, affecting employment, housing, education, and overall quality of life. The situation is particularly challenging for LGBTQ+ people, who already face difficulty in getting jobs and finding housing because of discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>4</sup> For LGBTQ+ people of color, the well-documented discrimination based on race and ethnicity can make finding a job and housing even more onerous. Ultimately, the intersection of overlapping and interdependent stigmatized identities – such as being LGBTQ+ and having a criminal record – can compound discrimination, social stigma, and the pressures of minority stress. And, in addition to causing and exacerbating health problems, substance use, and food insecurity, a lack of stable housing and employment opportunities significantly increases recidivism rates.<sup>5</sup>

But by passing LD 1911, a streamlined, automated record-sealing process can remove barriers and promote dignity for thousands of Mainers. We urge you to vote "Ought To Pass" on this bill, and give people who have served their time and demonstrated change a second chance to rebuild their lives.

Thank you,

Heide Lester (they/them)

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<sup>1</sup> Incarcerated LGBTQ+ Adults and Youth. 2022, sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/10/Incarcerated-LGBTQ-Youth-and-Adults.pdf.

<sup>2</sup> Prison Policy Initiative. "Visualizing the Unequal Treatment of LGBTQ People in the Criminal Justice System." Prisonpolicy.org, 2021, prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/03/02/lgbtq/.

<sup>3</sup> Unjust: How the Broken Criminal Justice System Fails LGBT People of Color. 2016, lgbtmap.org/file/lgbt-criminal-justice-poc.pdf

<sup>4</sup> Miller, Meghan. "Barriers to Employment for LGBTQI+ People Who Are Affected by the Criminal Legal System." Center for American Progress, 29 Apr. 2024, americanprogress.org/article/barriers-to-employment-for-lgbtqi-people-who-are-affected-by-the-criminal-legal-system/.

<sup>5</sup> "Beyond Recidivism: Redefining Measures to Understand Reentry Success." CSG Justice Center, 7 July 2025, csgjusticecenter.org/publications/beyond-recidivism-redefining-reentry-data-health-housing-employment/.