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Testimony of Representative Michele Meyer presenting
**LD 1922, An Act to Support Workforce Development for Families
That Were Involved in Child Protective Activities by Requiring the
Sealing of Certain Records**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Esteemed colleagues of the Health and Human Services Committee, as you all know, I am Representative Michele Meyer, and I am honored to be House Chair of this committee. I stand before you today to present LD 1922, An Act to Support Workforce Development for Families That Were Involved in Child Protective Activities by Requiring the Sealing of Certain Records.

This legislation proposes important changes to Maine's child abuse and neglect registry and background check process. These include:

- Establishing a clear timeline for excluding unsubstantiated or indicated records for the purposes of background checks – where either no or a low-level finding of abuse or neglect was made, provided no subsequent findings are made within one year.
- Establishing a clear timeline for excluding substantiated records for the purposes of background checks, after periods of time where there are no subsequent findings, and excluding the most serious types of abuse – serious physical injuries, fatalities, and sexual abuse or trafficking.

The current rules guiding the child abuse and neglect registry and background check processes mean that parents who have had a finding are held back from volunteer and employment opportunities – indefinitely. This is regardless of the type of finding. That means that the current process treats a parent who was a victim of domestic violence and “failed to protect” their child the same as someone who seriously physically abused their child.

The proposed changes in this legislation create a fair process for ensuring parents' past behaviors don't present barriers to future economic opportunities. In many ways, creating a clear process for the registry and background check process supports incentivizing parents to pursue personal growth, accountability, and rehabilitation efforts, helping individuals rebuild their lives without unnecessary obstacles.

Many parents have done the work to rehabilitate and reunify, with a judge determining that they can provide safety for their own children. When those changes have been made, and there are no subsequent issues, we should give those parents a second chance to pursue volunteer and employment opportunities. This is particularly important for workforce in fields we struggle to adequately staff, including health care, child care, and peer support, where their lived experience is needed and beneficial.

Critical to this proposal is the exclusion of certain types of findings, including serious physical injury or death, and sexual abuse or trafficking of a child. This ensures that those who commit the most serious offenses remain on the registry indefinitely. This supports public safety by acknowledging that some offenses present a long-term risk to children, which they should be protected from.

This legislation provides an important opportunity to adjust our current policies and practices related to the child abuse and neglect registry and background check processes, to strike a better balance in ensuring public safety, acknowledging that people can and do change, and removing barriers to workforce participation that are important, not just to the economic success of families but of our state overall. I urge you to join me in supporting this legislation.