

Testimony of Melissa Hackett

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In support of LD 1922, An Act to Support Workforce Development for Families That Were
Involved in Child Protective Activities by Requiring the Sealing of Certain Records

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the committee. My name is Melissa Hackett, and I am a Policy Associate with the Maine Children's Alliance. I also serve as the Coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network. I am testifying today in strong support of this legislation.

LD 1922 is about strengthening child and family well-being by improving how Maine uses child welfare records – so they protect children effectively, while also supporting accountability and family stability over time.

Ensuring child safety is not only about identifying and addressing risk in the moment. It is about building systems that reduce the conditions that make harm more likely in the future: family instability, financial insecurity, and social isolation. When systems treat people as permanent risks, regardless of time or context, they undermine those protective conditions.

This bill grew out of my work with parents with lived experience of Maine's child welfare system. When asked about priorities to improve this system, these parents consistently raise the same concern: Maine's child abuse and neglect registry does not distinguish among different types of findings, different levels of harm, or what has happened since. Under current law, all findings remain in the registry forever. There is no distinction between neglect and severe forms of abuse. There is no consideration of whether a child was ever removed from the home, whether safety concerns were resolved, or whether the parent successfully reunified under court supervision. And, when a background check is conducted, an employer receives only a flag indicating the presence of a registry finding, with no other information. The result is a system that treats every finding as a permanent, universal safety threat.

This approach does not make children safer. Instead, it blocks parents from employment and community life that supports protective conditions for families.

Our child abuse and neglect registry should be used as intended – as a tool to keep children safe by focusing on meaningful risks. It should not function as a permanent

barrier, excluding families who have addressed concerns, demonstrated accountability and moved forward. LD 1922 takes an evidence-informed approach to the use of the registry. It creates a process that will allow certain findings to be excluded from background checks only after a certain amount of time has passed and only when there are no additional findings. Most importantly, the most serious offenses – sexual abuse, serious physical injury to a child, death of a child, child trafficking – are explicitly excluded from this provision and will always remain visible to background check systems. To be perfectly clear, this bill does not change what information the state retains, only what is accessible publicly via background checks.

This bill represents thoughtful changes to the registry that strike an important balance in ensuring public safety and providing second chances that support family success. It draws a strong boundary around the most serious offenses, ensuring they are permanently visible in the system, while allowing other circumstances, where there is no risk to child safety, to stop functioning as lifelong penalties and barriers to family well-being.

I hope you will support this important legislation for Maine children and families.

Thank you.