



Linda Small

Executive Director, Reentry Sisters

In Favor of LD 1871 An Act to Permit Sealing Criminal History Record Information of Victims of Sex Trafficking or Sexual Exploitation

Before the Judiciary Committee

May 12, 2025, 1 pm

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

My name is Linda Small, and I am the Executive Director of Reentry Sisters, an organization dedicated to supporting justice-impacted women in Maine. I am here today to express our strong support for LD 1871, to permit the sealing of criminal records for survivors of Sex Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation.

At Reentry Sisters, we work with women who have survived unimaginable circumstances, including sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. One of those women is Cathy, a pseudonym; however, I have permission to tell her story. From a young age, Cathy was subjected to abuse and was loaned out to her father's friends. Her exposure to exploitation began in her earliest years, shaping her understanding of self-worth and survival. As a coping mechanism, Cathy turned to substance use, which made her vulnerable to further exploitation by a significant other who forced her into sex work to support their livelihood. For Cathy, the violence and manipulation she endured felt normal; it was all she had ever known.

After her release from incarceration, Cathy committed herself to recovery and began the hard work of healing from the profound trauma she had experienced. She reclaimed her life, but the stigma of her criminal record still haunts her. It follows her everywhere, affecting her ability to find stable housing, secure employment, and rebuild her life. Her record is a reminder of a past she is desperately trying to leave behind, a past defined not by choice, but by survival and coercion.

LD 1871 would allow survivors like Cathy a chance at a fresh start. This bill recognizes that many criminal convictions of sex-trafficked women are not the product of criminal intent but rather the direct result of manipulation, coercion, and survival under exploitation. By providing a pathway for sealing records, Maine would honor the resilience of survivors, acknowledging that their crimes were born from exploitation and victimization, not volition.

Furthermore, we believe that LD 1871 is a step forward for restorative justice in Maine. Survivors of sex trafficking deserve an opportunity to rebuild their lives free from the barriers

imposed by criminal convictions linked to their exploitation. They deserve dignity, opportunity, and the chance to fully participate in society without the chains of their past binding them.

I urge you to support LD 1871 and help pave the way for survivors like Cathy to move forward, empowered, unburdened, and with the opportunity to live free from the stigma of convictions tied to their victimization.

Thank you for your time and commitment to justice and equity for all Mainers.

Sincerely,

Linda Small

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Executive Director, Reentry Sisters

<https://legislature.maine.gov/committee/#Committees/JUD>

<https://www.mainesten.org/data.html>