

Oral Testimony in support of Clean Slate
Prepared for Joshua Brister
President & Director of Strategic Partnerships
Maine Black Chamber of Commerce

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Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1911, Clean Slate Maine

Good morning, members of the Judiciary Committee. As many of you know, my name is Joshua Briste and I'm the President and Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Maine Black Chamber of Commerce. **I am here today in support of LD 1911, Clean Slate Maine.** This is a commonsense bill that would strengthen Maine's workforce, expand the labor pool, and increase economic opportunities for thousands of Mainers.

Nearly 300,000 adults in Maine, or a quarter of our state's adult population, have some form of a criminal record. This can pose an enormous obstacle to a person's employment, housing, occupational licensing, and educational prospects — all of which directly impact one's ability to earn a stable living and support themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, the impact of a criminal record is not equally distributed. The reality of racism in our criminal justice system renders Black and brown people in Maine – and across the country – more likely to be arrested, charged, convicted, and sentenced for crimes. In fact, Black people in Maine are incarcerated at a rate 9.2 times higher than white people and nearly half of Black adults in Maine have a criminal record. Black and brown people are also held longer on average in prisons than their white counterparts for similar crimes. For these individuals, the collateral consequences associated with having a record are numerous.

While record sealing currently exists in Maine, the petition-based process is costly, confusing, and complex. By automating the process, Clean Slate legislation would help remove unnecessary barriers and allow more Mainers the opportunity to work, earn, and participate in our communities.

For my members and employers across the state, Clean Slate would provide welcome relief. Employers across our state are struggling to find and retain talent, all while thousands of hardworking Mainers are being unnecessarily sidelined from the workforce. Keeping capable, motivated people out of jobs worsens labor shortages, reduces consumer spending, and shrinks tax revenue. Passing automatic record sealing, in contrast, would allow our businesses to hire individuals who are eager to get back to work. This, in turn, benefits everyone.

Clean Slate would also make Maine safer. Having access to a stable job is one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism, and states across the country have passed automatic record sealing with no negative impact on public safety. In fact, the data shows that, after five years, individuals who had their records sealed are less likely to commit a new crime than the general population.

As a business leader and the President of the Maine Black Chamber of Commerce, I strive each day to support our Black-owned businesses and to make Maine an even greater place to live and work. Clean Slate laws demonstrate how broad but achievable structural changes advance racial equity and economic inclusion, and supporting such legislation demonstrates a sincere and

meaningful commitment to fighting structural racism. I support LD 1911, and I urge the Committee to pass this critical legislation. Thank you.

Joshua Brister

President & Director of Strategic Partnerships

Maine Black Chamber of Commerce