

Kelly Merrill
Stratton
LD 1911

Date: 8 January 2026, 10a mtg via Zoom.

Re: Maine Green Independent Party LD 1646 Good Samaritan bill OTP

Good morning, Chairs Sen. Anne Carney and Rep. Amy Kuhn and Members of the Judiciary. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and testify in support of LD 1911.

My name is Kelly Merrill and I live in Stratton, Maine. I'm here today in my capacity as the Co-Chair of the Maine Green Independent Party, representing 37K voters statewide.

We support LD 1911, "An Act to Automatically Seal Criminal History Record Information for Certain Crimes," known as the Clean Slate bill and urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass.

25% of Mainers have a criminal record. That record continues to punish people long after they've completed their sentence, creating permanent barriers to education, jobs, and housing. And though there is some form of record relief, it's largely inaccessible to most people, creating a two-tiered system of justice, which is an injustice. As Sen. Talbot-Ross said earlier, and I'd like to emphasize in this testimony, that half of criminal cases result in non-conviction but still appear on one's record.

This is an issue of restorative justice, and this is an issue of racial justice. Black people in Maine are incarcerated at a rate 9.2 times higher than white people. Automating record relief will help reduce that shameful disparity.

This measure would provide relief to an estimated 163K Mainers, enabling them to achieve more stability and security in a hostile world. Data shows that average quarterly wages rise about 23% within a year of record sealing.

I'd like to put this into some context. We are living in a time when people, everyday people, are getting squeezed in every part of their lives. More and more people are living on the edge. The edge of poverty, the edge of homelessness, the edge of despair. People struggle to earn enough to live. It's often not enough to retain housing, not enough to feed or clothe our kids, not enough to survive. A 23% increase in earnings could have a significant impact on people's lives.

We urge this committee to vote LD 1911 OTP and join the 13 other states plus the District of Columbia in providing people with much needed record relief.

Respectfully submitted,
Kelly F. Merrill
Co-Chair, Maine Green Independent Party