

Testimony in Support of LD 1911: An Act to Automatically Seal Criminal History Record Information for Certain Crimes

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dr. Merideth C. Norris and I am board certified by the American Osteopathic Board of Family Physicians and have a lifetime certification from the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

I am speaking in favor of this bill. In my over 20 years of experience working with people with substance use disorders in the State of Maine, I have become very familiar with the prefrontal cortex of the brain. I often describe this to patients as the “hey, don’t do that” part of the brain. Individuals with substance use disorders have impaired prefrontal cortices, which impacts impulse control and decision making. This means that the individual has literally had their decision making brakes go out.

Even in a person without SUD, the prefrontal cortex is not well developed until around age 25. As the mother of three children, ages 19, 21, and 23, I can tell you that although they are brilliant and wonderful human beings, I do not encourage them to make decisions right now which could impact them for the rest of their lives. I am certainly glad to have moved on from my early 20s.

Why is this important? Because of the 1 in 4 adults in Maine who have a conviction history, a great many occurred while the offender was young, was under the influence of substances, or both. In other words, they were in no way making the kinds of thoughtful decisions that they could today as sober and/or older citizens.

There is a school of thought which asserts that if anyone commits a crime, there should be consequences, and I fully agree with this. But for how long?

Prior convictions can be a life sentence when they can play a huge role in whether or not someone has the ability to get a job, to get housing, and to have other opportunities which could allow them to thrive. How does this benefit them? Or even more importantly, how does it benefit society for our community members to be facing these barriers years and years after the conviction occurred? In my opinion, we all benefit when individuals who have sustained change are able to access stable jobs and safe housing.

LD 1911 does not include convictions involving sexual assault, domestic violence, or crimes against children. This bill does not threaten public safety. If anything, this bill will reduce recidivism when more Mainers have access to meet their basic needs.

We have an opportunity to provide many with earned second chances, security, and stability. I respectfully urge this committee to capitalize on this opportunity by supporting LD 1911.