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Samantha Gilbert

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Testimony on behalf of LD549, to the Judiciary Committee in Augusta

My name is Samantha Gilbert. I am 22-years-old and a college student at University of Maine at Machias.

When I had just turned 18, I was charged with and convicted with shoplifting with a friend of mine. My friend Jessica, without my knowledge while we were shopping, stuffed a bracelet into my purse, and also loaded up her pockets. We were both brought to court, where the D.A told me to plead guilty, because if I said not guilty, and there was a trial, and I was found guilty, I could make it worse for myself, and might serve jail time compared to a small \$200 fee. I took a guilty charge that day, and have regretted it every day since.

Because of this guilty plea, people turn away my job applications, even for entry-level jobs. The guidance counselor at my college told me that because of my conviction for this minor offence when I was 18, I have entire fields of occupations (such as the health field) I will never be able to get work in due to the concern in these fields about elder abuse, and stealing prescription drugs. Even getting into college, I had to have a board of directors look into my criminal past to see if they might want me, and while in my case they said yes, they just as easily could have said no. When I get out of college, I expect to have a hard time finding a job in my chosen field (or pretty much any field) because of this conviction that colors me out to be a risk.

There are plenty of people who have no criminal records who want jobs, so employers don't even look at people who need the money just as badly who have a criminal record. I am not a bad person, and I am being punished every day for pleading guilty. Convictions like this inhibit people like me from being productive. The conviction in and of itself is a roadblock to living the life we all want to live. Because of my not getting a job, there was a time when I was forced onto public assistances to feed myself, and have a place to live. I am not proud of that. I want the chance to be an asset to this world, not a leach on it. And I would (as I'm sure many others would as well) appreciate a chance to do that.