

Chairperson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Christopher Davis. I'm a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, the Third Vice Commander of American Legion Post 6 in Grand Forks, and a mentor with our local Veteran's Wellness Court. I come before you not just as someone who believes in second chances—but as someone who works every day to help others earn theirs.

Veterans Treatment Court is where I've seen redemption in action. I work with justice-involved veterans—many of whom are struggling with mental health and substance use issues—who are actively turning their lives around. It's intensive, it's demanding, and it's transformative. The individuals I mentor show that when we invest in rehabilitation and accountability together, people thrive. I am proud to be a part of that work.

But I'm also someone who has experienced firsthand how the current record sealing law continues to punish those who have clearly changed. In 2022, five years after my sentencing, I petitioned the Grand Forks District Court to seal my record. I submitted documentation showing I'd applied for over 700 jobs, received eight job offers, and lost all but one of them after background checks. I provided evidence of continued education, clean living, and professional growth. I included proof of the professional certifications I was unable to obtain solely because of my criminal record.

None of it was enough. The law required me to prove that the benefit to me outweighed a broad, abstract “public interest.” That's not justice—it's a loaded scale. Once my petition was denied, I was told I'd have to wait three more years before trying again. No appeal. No further review. Just more lost time, missed opportunity, and quiet punishment.

This is why I strongly support House Bill 1263—and why I was deeply disappointed to see the language removing the “presumption of openness” struck from the bill.

That presumption is not neutral. It puts a thumb on the scale against people who have already done the hard work to change. In my case, it outweighed everything—my military service, my mentorship of fellow veterans and recovering addicts, and my consistent efforts to rebuild my life and give back to my community.

I feel it is important to clarify what record sealing actually means. This process does **not** erase a criminal conviction. Sealed records remain fully available to law enforcement, licensing boards, and government agencies which require access. They can still be used to enhance future sentencing if a person reoffends. What sealing does is limit public access—by employers, landlords, and background check companies—to convictions that no longer reflect who a person is. Importantly, sealing only happens if a judge determines that the petitioner is rehabilitated. That finding should carry real weight—not be automatically discounted by a default presumption.

As I stand before this Committee, advocating for change, I hope it is clear to see that I am not a danger to society; I am part of the solution. I've committed my life to helping others through

mentorship, advocacy, and leading by example. I've done so while carrying the burden of a criminal record that no longer reflects who I am.

I am grateful this bill retains the right to appeal district court denials—that alone is a meaningful step forward. However, by keeping the presumption of openness standard intact, we are still telling people like myself that no matter how far we've come, the system sees only where we started.

Thank you for your time, and for considering how this bill can better reflect both justice and the possibility of redemption. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.

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