



January 25, 2022

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Elizabeth Ward Saxl and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA), the organization which represents and serves Maine's [sexual violence prevention and response programs](#) as well as [Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers](#). MECASA initiates and advocates for victim-centered public policy; provides expert training, technical assistance, and resources for providers and partners; and funds the service providers in your communities.

MECASA is here today **in support of LD 1888, "An Act to Amend the Laws Affecting Sex Offenders and Petitions for Child Custody."**

Unfortunately, children in Maine continue to experience sexual violence. Approximately 50% of calls every year to Maine's sexual assault support helpline relate to child sexual abuse. And last year, Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers interviewed almost 2,400 children who were suspected of having been sexually abused. (They also provided thousands of hours of family advocacy to make sure those kids and their families had the support they needed.)

As a member of the Sex Offender Management and Risk Assessment Advisory Commission, a hanger-on at CLAC, and a someone who tries to keep up with FLAC from a distance, I am aware there are a number of technical issues with this bill. However, the concept is an important one. We need to do everything we can to ensure that kids are safe and that there are not undue burdens placed on non-offending caregivers. As a result, we hope the committee will find a path forward, perhaps in line with FLAC's recommendations.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

About Maine's Sexual Assault Service Providers

Maine's [sexual violence service providers](#) provide free and confidential services across the state to victims/survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault and those close to them, as well as to individuals who wish to increase their understanding of the issues. Just some of the services include a 24-hour statewide sexual assault helpline, crisis intervention and information, support groups, in-person accompaniment and advocacy through the medical and legal systems, and school- and community-based prevention education. Services are provided for a victim/survivor regardless of when they experienced sexual violence and regardless of what type of sexual violence they experienced. Types of sexual violence include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment and gender-based bullying, child sexual abuse, elder sexual abuse, stalking, sex trafficking, and sexual violence within an intimate partner relationship.

24/7 Confidential

Maine Sexual Assault Helpline: [1-800-871-7741](tel:1-800-871-7741)