



January 22, 2024

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

My name is Melissa Martin 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 submitting written testimony in support of LD 780 a RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy. Thank you to Senators Vitelli, Bailey, Brenner, Carney, Daughtry, and Representatives Warren, Moonen, Moriarty, Reckitt, and Rielly for bringing this legislation.

MECASA and the network of sexual assault support centers it represents oppose all efforts that would force any person to carry a pregnancy to term against their will. Laws and policies restricting rights to end a pregnancy continue to disparately impact the most vulnerable members of our society while eroding bodily autonomy for all. Restrictions on abortion services and birth control disproportionately harm people who are LGBTQ+, who are members of the BIPOC community, and who are living in under-resourced, low-income communities.

Ending sexual violence is rooted in the principle that the person, not another individual or the state, has the sole right to determine what happens to their body, including decisions about reproductive health care. Restrictions on these decisions affirm that others have the right to determine what happens to the body of another. Enabling decisions and bodily autonomy ultimately communicates an intolerance of sexual violence. All people must be entitled to agency, bodily autonomy, and self-determination. As part of the effort to prevent and end gender-based sexual violence, everyone must have access to the full range of comprehensive reproductive health care. We remain strongly behind reproductive healthcare options for all people, including birth control, gender-affirming care, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, prenatal care, and abortion.

Ending sexual violence requires that all communities respect that the person, not another individual or the state, has the sole right to determine what happens to their body. This includes decisions about reproductive health care. In addition, survivors can and do become pregnant as a result of sexual violence and are more likely to experience forced pregnancy. Sexual violence is a violation of autonomy, and restrictions on reproductive health care, including restrictions on access to abortion services, only perpetuate the violation and are harmful and life-threatening. The list of negative outcomes and harms that may be caused by forced pregnancy includes, but is not limited to:

- Loss of sense of empowerment, bodily autonomy, and control – all which impact and can prevent trauma healing;
- Greater chance of experiencing more violence, pain, and suffering;
- Interference with access to equitable educational opportunities and the completion of education, resulting in adverse outcomes, including reduced earnings;
- Exposure to potential criminal charges for trying to seek abortion services or simply based on their status as a pregnant person (for example: drug use during pregnancy);
- Becoming a parent forever when not ready or able to be or having to give up parental rights to a child; and,
- Increased life-threatening complications from pregnancy and childbirth, especially for people who do not have access to appropriate healthcare.

For all of these reasons, we strongly support Maine protecting reproductive choice and freedom in a variety of ways. We offer no specific testimony as to whether a constitutional amendment is required to affect these protections in Maine law. Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 780.

About Maine's Sexual Assault Service Providers

One in five Mainers will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.¹ Each year, 14,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.²

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

¹ Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

² *Ibid.*

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)

mecasa

MAINE COALITION AGAINST
SEXUAL ASSAULT

info@mecasa.org | mecasa.org
207-626-0034



STATEWIDE
SEXUAL ASSAULT HELPLINE
1-800-871-7741

Free. Private. 24/7.

MAINE'S SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT CENTERS

AMHC Sexual Assault Services (AMHC)

Serving Aroostook, Hancock, & Washington Counties •
amhcsexualassaultservices.org

Immigrant Resource Center of Maine

Serving Androscoggin & Cumberland Counties • ircofmaine.org

Rape Response Services (RRS)

Serving Penobscot & Piscataquis Counties • rronline.org

Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Services (SAPARS)

Serving Androscoggin, Oxford & Franklin Counties and the towns of
Bridgton & Harrison • sapars.org

Sexual Assault Crisis & Support Center (SAC & SC)

Serving Kennebec & Somerset Counties • silentnomore.org

Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine (SARSSM)

Serving Cumberland & York Counties • sarsonline.org

Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine (SASSMM)

Serving Eastern Cumberland, Sagadahoc, Knox, Waldo & Lincoln
Counties • sassmm.org

MORE SEXUAL VIOLENCE SERVICES

Maine TransNet • mainetrans.net • info@mainetransnet.org

Wabanaki Women's Coalition • wabanakiwomenscoalition.org
207-763-3478

Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-551-3639

Houlton Band of Maliseets, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-532-6401

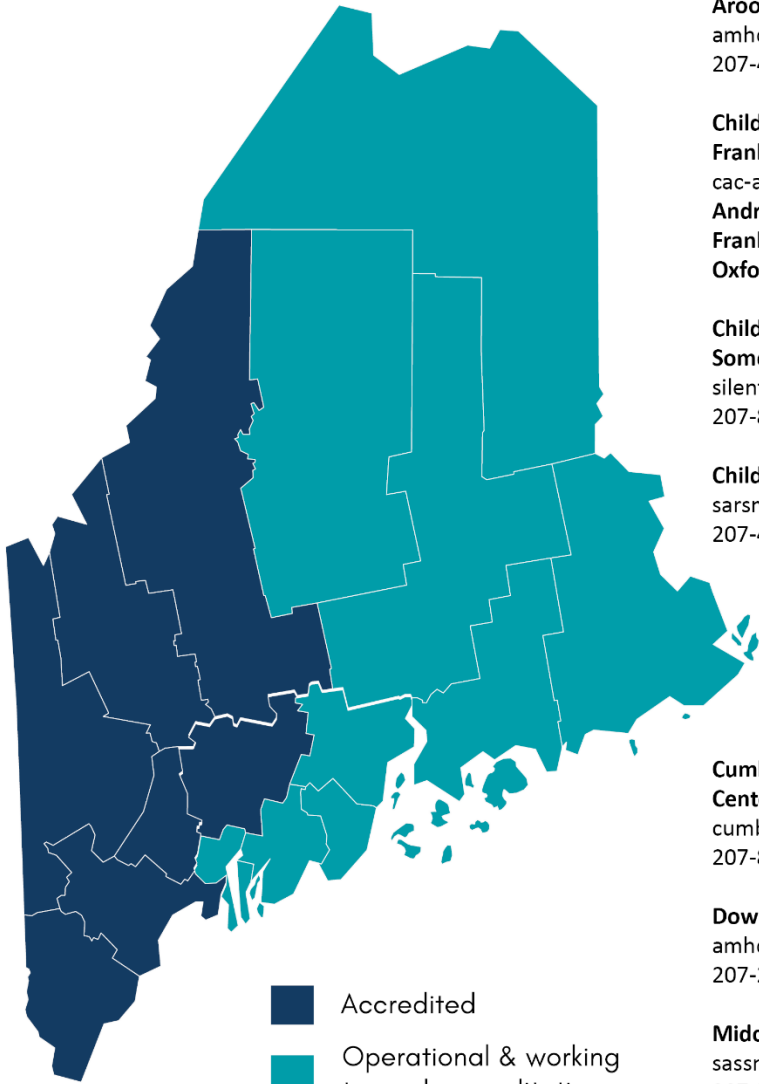
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

Penobscot Indian Nation, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-631-4886



Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



Aroostook County Children's Advocacy Center
amhcsas.org
207-472-6134

Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties
cac-af0.org
Androscoggin: 207-784-0436
Franklin: 207-778-9777
Oxford: 207-739-1228

Children's Advocacy Center of Kennebec & Somerset Counties
silentnomore.org/about-our-cac
207-861-4491

Children's Advocacy Center of York County
sarsmm.org
207-459-2380

Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Center
cumberlandcountycac.org
207-879-6160

Downeast Children's Advocacy Center
amhcsas.org
207-255-3687

Midcoast Children's Advocacy Center
sassmm.org
207-522-7162

Penquis Children's Advocacy Center
penquiscac.org
207-974-2469