

February 22, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

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 here today to testify in favor of the Purchased Social Services portion of the budget.

The vast majority of funding for sexual assault services in the state of Maine is provided through federal funding. Currently, MECASA and the local sexual assault centers across Maine receive \$2.48 million dollars per year in state funds. A few years ago, facing gaps in services in certain areas of the state and facing the possibility of waitlists for essential services, such as forensic interviews at Children's Advocacy Centers; we received the current state funding to fill those critical gaps. At that time, the additional funding prevented a gap in services crisis.

Today, our sexual assault centers face a different type of crisis. In the past year, a third of staff at sexual assault centers left their jobs. A survey of sexual assault advocates statewide indicated that 49% planned to leave their role in the next two years.

You may think the reason is burnout. Advocates' jobs are incredibly difficult. In addition to a regular full-time, professional job, almost all advocates cover overnight and weekend on-call shifts to staff our statewide sexual assault support helpline. Because advocates also accompany survivors to hospitals when they need a sexual assault forensic examination, advocates must be available regionally; when called to the hospital, they are frequently there for several hours in the middle of the night. Outside of the 24/7 helpline, advocates are working with survivors of sexual violence who are often experiencing deep trauma and navigating challenging systems—the legal system, the criminal justice system, and the mental health system. Our forensic interviewers interview children and hear their detailed stories of child sexual abuse.

Despite this, most advocates want to stay in their role. The number one reason they plan to leave is because of pay. In fact, Seventy percent of advocates identified pay as the main reason they are seeking to leave their job.

As a result, MECASA is working on a funding bill, LD 566, that will do two important things.

First, it will raise base pay for sexual assault advocates. The base pay at sexual assault support centers across the state is just over \$30,000 per year. We are seeking to raise this to \$45,000. This will allow center staff to stay in their jobs and pay for basic needs like housing, food, and healthcare.

Second, this bill will provide additional funding for agencies that work with those disproportionately impacted by sexual violence—such as trans Mainers, Wabanaki women, individuals with disabilities, and those that have served in the military. This half of the bill will give money to organizations that are already deeply embedded in these communities to support development and strengthening of sexual violence prevention and response services.

The needs we face today are just as critical as when we were facing gaps in services. Turning over a third of staff every year is not sustainable for local sexual assault centers.

As a result, we are asking for your support on LD 566 and to consider incorporating that bill into the budget. Thank you for your consideration. We would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

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### About Maine's Sexual Assault Service Providers

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

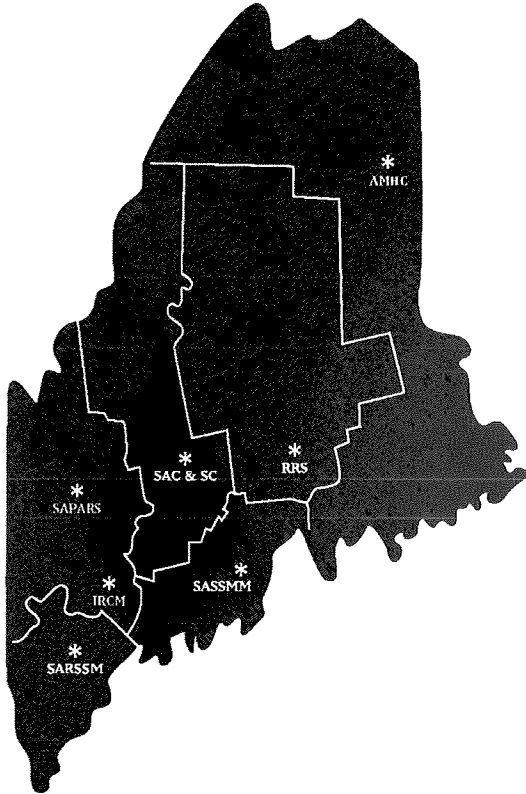
violence they experienced. Types of sexual violence include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment and gender-based bullying, child sexual abuse, elder sexual abuse, stalking, sex trafficking, and sexual violence within an intimate partner relationship.

*24/7 Confidential*  
*Maine Sexual Assault Helpline: 1-800-871-7741*

# **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 • rrsonline.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

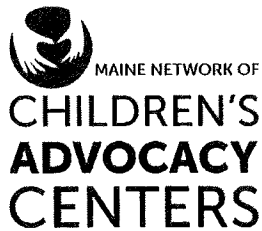
Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Domestic & Sexual Violence  
Advocacy Center • 207-551-3639

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

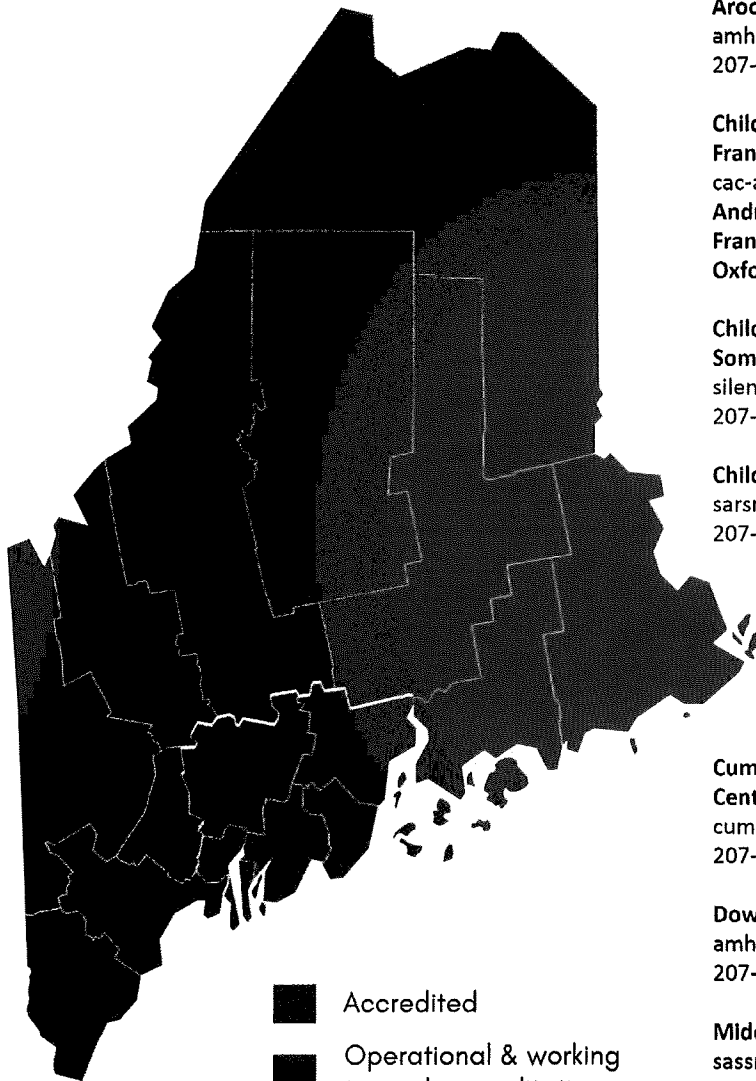
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual  
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917



Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



# Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



-  Accredited
-  Operational & working toward accreditation

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

**Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties**  
cac-afo.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