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MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

April 11, 2023

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 here today neither for nor against LD 1435 An Act to Reduce Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

The main piece of this bill we want to address is the requirement for law enforcement agencies to draft a protocol requesting that officers who are interacting with someone they have reason to believe "has experienced human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation" if they have, indeed, experienced those harms. We are concerned that this could lead to uncomfortable questioning of survivors of sexual violence generally, and more specifically those who are lower-income, people of color, or LGBTQ+.

The way the protocol is outlined is in conflict with many principles that sexual assault centers have about how to address survivors of sexual harm. For example, advocates always try to allow a survivor self-identify the harm that occurred to them instead of limiting the harm to labels like "exploitation" or "trafficking". In addition, advocates rarely, if ever, affirmatively ask a survivor if they identify as a survivor, instead allowing a survivor complete autonomy and choice about when to disclose harm that happened to them and how to name that harm. Finally, many survivors of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation do not immediately identify what has happened to them as harm.

Asking this question, though well intentioned, could actually have the opposite effect, making the survivor less likely to disclose to law enforcement down the line when they are ready to seek

support. Depending on when and where the officer asks the question, the question could also create health and safety risks to the survivor.

In addition, if a survivor were to name that they had experienced commercial sexual exploitation, the law enforcement officer is then supposed to understand the full range of options available to the survivor, including everything from case management to advocacy to substance use supports. This is an incredibly complex coordination effort for a regular patrol officer to engage in. Survivors of commercial sexual exploitation often have a complex set of needs and deserve to have those addressed by someone specifically trained and deeply connected to community resources.

Finally, we also want to acknowledge that there are differing points of view across the community of survivors of sexual violence about whether all sex work is exploitative. In respect of the fact that there are survivors who feel that it can be consensual, we do join in the concern that language throughout this bill erases that concept of consensual sex work.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

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 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*

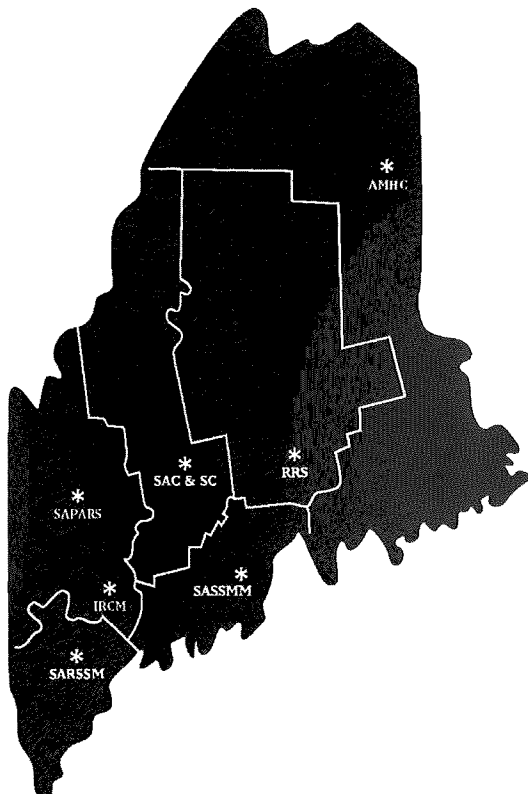
¹ Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

² *Ibid.*

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**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 •
amhesexualassaultservices.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

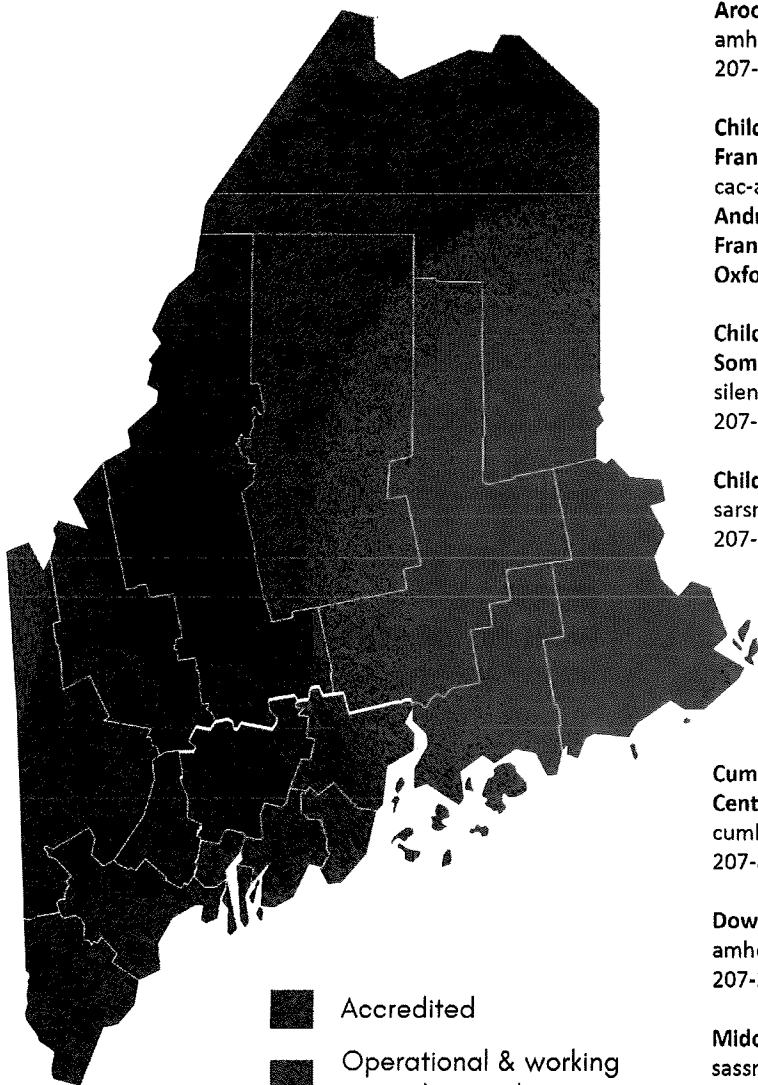
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



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

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