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**MAINE COALITION AGAINST
SEXUAL ASSAULT**

May 1, 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 in support of LD 1619 an Act to Improve Reproductive Privacy Laws. Thank you to Governor Mills, Speaker Talbot Ross, President Jackson, and the numerous cosponsors 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.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 1619 and 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

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.*