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**MAINE COALITION AGAINST
SEXUAL ASSAULT**

March 5, 2024

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Affairs:

My name is Quinn Gormley 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 227 an Act to Regarding Health Care in the State. Thank you to Representative Perry for bringing this legislation.

Reproductive Justice:

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+ and communities of color, especially Black women 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.

In particular, this bill builds on important work that the Legislature did last session for abortion access. This bill is particularly important because allowing Maine providers to provide broad access is particularly important to low-income survivors of sexual violence who may not be able to afford the cost of travel to receive in person care.

Gender Affirming Care for Minors:

At least 70% of Trans Mainers experience sexual violence at some point in their lifetime.¹ 83% experience this before transitioning.² These experiences often begin in childhood.³ 41% of Trans youth in Maine experience forced sexual contact (versus 11% of cis youth).⁴

When Trans Mainers are able to access gender affirming care and transition this reduces vulnerability to sexual violence.⁵

¹ Maine Transgender Community Survey Results, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iea9ykjXtRc>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, <https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/>.

⁵ Maine Transgender Community Survey Results, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iea9ykjXtRc>.

In addition, the most recent Needs Assessment conducted by the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault found that the largest need of sexual violence survivors across the state in general is basic needs, such as housing, food, and healthcare.

Because of the high rates of sexual violence in the Trans community, you have the opportunity to meet the basic, essential healthcare needs of a group of survivors by supporting this bill.

Trafficking:

There are materials circulating about this bill that state that it encourages trafficking. I want to take this opportunity to clarify what trafficking is and what it is not. Trafficking, also known as the commercial sexual exploitation of minors, is the sexual exploitation of children for the financial benefit of others.

While often seen as a problem of larger states, commercial sexual exploitation happens all over the country, including here in Maine. In fact, all Maine counties have reported suspicions or confirmation of commercial sexual exploitation. Maine's sexual assault support centers and children's advocacy centers have seen over 100 cases of commercial sexual exploitation since 2020.

These are cases where children's sexual images or sexual acts are offered in exchange for financial benefit for the person exploiting them. They are not cases of adults assisting minors in accessing healthcare such as abortion or gender affirming care. I will let the healthcare providers speak in more detail to the variety of ways to ensure that minors are involved, engaged, and participating in their own medical decisions to protect them from exploitation, but it is important to ensure that we are clear on what the exploitation of minors is and is not.

LD 227 does not encourage or support the commercial sexual exploitation of minors or trafficking of minors.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 227 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.⁶ Each year, 14,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.⁷

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

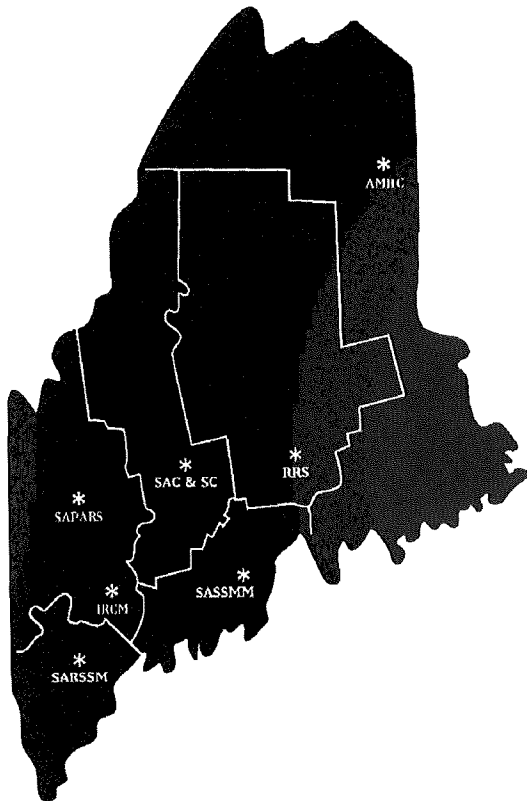
⁶ Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

⁷ *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 •
amhcsexualassaultservices.org

Immigrant Resource Center of Maine

Serving Androscoggin & Cumberland Counties • ircofmaine.org

Rape Response Services (RRS)

Serving Penobscot & Piscataquis Counties • rrrsonline.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

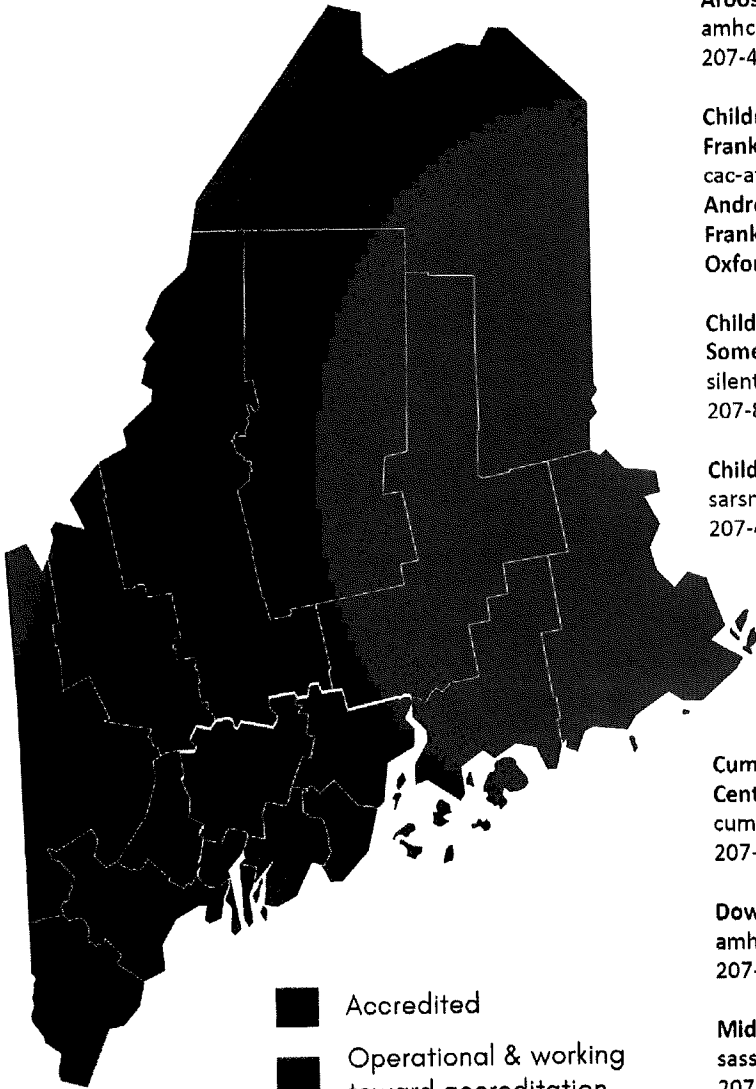
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

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