

February 24, 2025

Good Afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations Committee and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Erin Frankhauser. I am an advocate at Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine, and I'm here to ask you to increase funding for sexual assault services in this budget.

I am a systems advocate – I specialize in helping survivors and their families navigate the confusing systems they encounter after experiencing sexual violence. I accompany survivors to the hospital for medical exams, to law enforcement agencies to make reports, to the courts for criminal proceedings and for filing and negotiating Protection Orders.

I listen while they talk about the worst things that ever happened to them, and make sure they know that I believe them, and that they are not alone. Survivors often feel like nobody has ever felt this way, and may struggle with flashbacks and so much more. And while dealing with these feelings, survivors are asked to make decisions at a time when they can't comprehend what just happened, let alone what's next. Here's the value of advocacy – when they're faced with these decisions, while still reeling from their trauma, advocates can say – these are your options and I can support you to make choices that feel right for you.

Being an advocate is taxing and difficult work, to hold these stories, sit with those in pain, and support them through the complicated moments that follow. But like the advocates I work with across the state, I've seen how my work with survivors matters over and over again.

A mother was anxious her 3-year-old would have to testify in court about her father's abuse, because as a kid she had to, and remembered the trauma of talking about her abuse to a courtroom full of strangers. I was able to tell her new legislation makes it possible for children's advocacy center interviews to be admitted in court.

A survivor, homeless for 10 years, said I was the first person that believed her and without me, she might still be homeless.

Advocacy also helps the systems we interact with. For example, negotiating Protection Orders serves survivors who now don't have to rehash their trauma in open court, but also lightens the load on judges and court staff and saves communities money.

I am honored to do what I do. But this work I love doesn't pay enough that I can live on my own. A colleague told me as a single mother she lived in a rundown apartment and could barely afford groceries on her salary – she left the work she loved for better pay as a babysitter. Our Children's Advocacy Center went 8 months with only one family advocate, responsible for supporting every family they served.

If things do not change, this field will be unable to sustain a full workforce. A world with fewer advocates would be a disservice to survivors and to the communities they live in and systems they engage with. It would mean survivors walking into court blindly, having to explain what happened in detail in front of their abuser, meeting with prosecutors and not knowing what questions to ask. It would mean survivors feeling alone and their mental health suffering. It would mean law enforcement unable to call an advocate to support a survivor who is reporting, a child that doesn't get a forensic interview, Pine Tree

Legal not receiving referrals, and SAFE nurses losing the support they value in their ERs in the middle of the night.

Sexual violence happens a lot, survivors need the supports advocates provide, and without funding, this vital work is at risk. All the advocates who do this work and the survivors who depend on us are counting on you to make sure we have the funding we need. Please support us by including funding for sexual assault services in this budget.

Thank you for your time today and I would be happy to answer any question you might have.

Erin Frankhauser, Systems Advocate
Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine

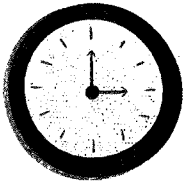
Did You Know? Our Services are...

FREE

There is **free help** for survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones around the state. No lengthy intake. No health insurance. No billing.



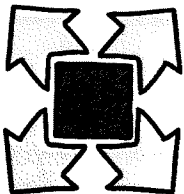
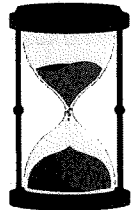
24/7



The Statewide helpline is available **24/7** and supports everyday people like you, your family, and your neighbors. In the last decade the number of helpline calls has doubled, but the service remains as always - available.

STILL HERE

Information, support, and resources are available no matter how long it's been since the violence happened. Over 25% of the clients served by sexual assault support centers waited **over a year** after being hurt to reach out.



EXPANSIVE

Our programs aren't just for sexual assault. We also support people who are experiencing stalking, sexual harassment, sex exploitation, and human trafficking. Even if it's not a crime. Even if you're not sure what to call it. Just last year MECASA programs served nearly 250 individuals who experienced human trafficking and sex exploitation.

EVERYWHERE

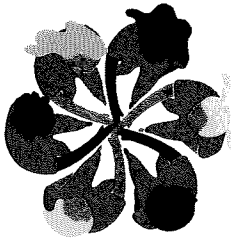
Advocates meet people all over their communities - last year half of sexual assault support center clients received at least one service in person. The rest? - via phone or videochat! Whatever your comfort level, there's an option. Advocates care about ensuring services work for the people they serve.



FOR MORE THAN JUST SURVIVORS



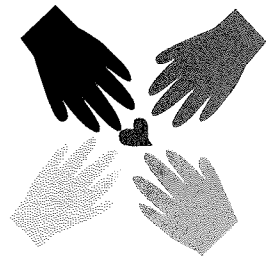
Sexual violence can impact many people - family, friends, and even professionals who are part of supporting survivors and loved ones. Help is available for anyone affected by sexual violence, even indirectly. Last year advocates supported over 1,500 loved ones (and many more professionals!) as they healed from the impacts of trauma in their communities.



UNIQUE

Advocates have a unique job - to listen and believe survivors. Even though their job is to listen, they also know a lot about healthcare, legal systems, and mental health services. Advocates provide information, but they never try to persuade people to do anything. Their job is to listen to your needs, offer information to help you make informed choices, and support you in following whatever paths you choose.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER



Life after sexual violence can be isolating. Connecting with other people who have gone through similar experiences can help people heal. Last year, there were 298 support groups for sexual violence

survivors. Groups take all different shapes, last year groups included online chat rooms, book binding groups, trauma-informed yoga, virtual video groups, and groups in jails and prisons.



CARING

Sometimes it can be hard to talk with friends and family about your experience of sexual violence. Advocates are people you can talk with without worrying or feeling like you need to say things a certain way - you can even do it anonymously. Their whole job is to listen, believe, and support you. There are over 100 sexual assault advocates around the state ready to support survivors who need them. Ninety-one percent (91%) of people surveyed who got help from advocates rated their support 4 or 5 stars (out of 5).

FLEXIBLE

Advocates can help with lots of different things, but it's up to survivors what kind of support they receive. The most common way advocates help is by listening and talking. Even though many people don't know what to expect when they pick up the phone, 96% of people advocates talked with said that they received the information or support they needed.





CONNECTED



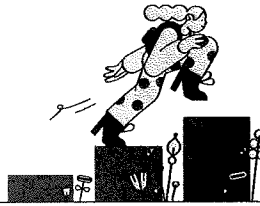
Advocates are connected to the other people in your community who are part of responding to sexual violence. Last year advocates supported over 1,700 survivors and loved ones to help them navigate systems like the criminal and civil legal system, Title IX, PREA in jails or prisons, and housing. They even went with over 700 people and supported them as they attended interviews, court, hospital exams, or other health and justice appointments.

SUPPORTING NEW MAINERS



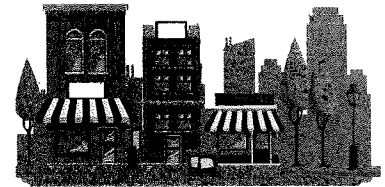
Immigrants and refugees have to navigate so many challenges - new culture, laws, communities, and financial realities. Getting support from people who share your culture or the experience of being new to Maine can help people feel safe and support their healing. The Immigrant Resource Center of Maine (IRCM) is one of the programs providing sexual violence support in our communities. Last year, IRCM provided culturally and linguistically specific help to 43 sexual violence survivors in Maine.

CHANGING THE FUTURE



Sexual assault service centers have been around for a long time (most of them for more than 30 years!). While core services like the helpline and support groups have stayed the same, centers also work to make sure people don't experience sexual violence to begin with through education and systems change. Last year prevention efforts around the state reached over 28,000 Mainers.

EDUCATING YOUR COMMUNITIES



Community members have an important role in keeping us all safe. Understanding what sexual violence is and why it happens is an important part of supporting survivors and of preventing it from happening in the future. Last year, sexual assault support centers educated over 2,500 adults about sexual violence. That's 2,500 people who are now creating healthier and safer communities in your backyard.

LEARNING & GROWING

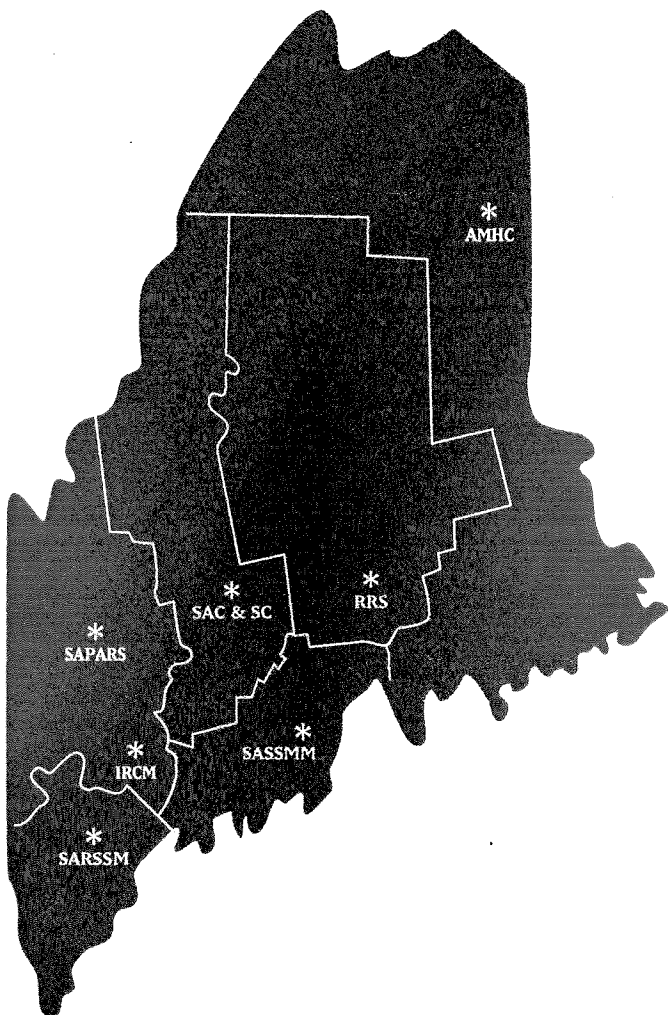


The identities you hold impact your chances of experiencing sexual violence and the reality of healing and seeking justice after you've been hurt. Advocates are working hard to ensure that support is available that meets everyone's needs and that we're focusing prevention efforts on the communities that need it most. Part of that work includes partnering with organizations who provide identity specific services, preparing to serve people speaking languages other than English, and ensuring that advocacy and education is accessible to those with disabilities. It also means growing together as we unlearn behaviors and attitudes that have hurt people in our communities and find new and better ways to do our work.

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 •
amhcsas.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 • sarssm.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