

March 17, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Marion Hylan Barr, and I am offering 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 950, "An Act to Prevent Domestic and Sexual Abuse of Children and Increase Access to Protection from Abuse Orders by Allowing Children to File Protection from Abuse Orders on Their Own Behalf." Thank you to Sens. Bailey, Carney and Talbot Ross and Rep. Kuhn for sponsoring this legislation.

For too long there have been minors experiencing abuse who need to access the Protection from Abuse process but have not had an adult willing or able to support them in this process.

We know that the highest risk of experiencing sexual harm is for persons who are 12 to 34 years of age.<sup>1</sup> Children who experience sexual abuse may struggle the most with finding a supportive adult to help them navigate this process; as many as 93% of victims under the age of 18 know their abuser.<sup>2</sup> The abuser may be related to the child, including an older sibling, parent, or other family member; a teacher; a coach or instructor; a caretaker; or the parent of another child. In Maine, over half of the children that disclose child sexual abuse at a Children's Advocacy Center disclose about a family member or someone close to them.

Because children often experience abuse by someone a parent knows, the parent may struggle to believe or support their child in reporting their abuse. For example, one survivor in Maine

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<sup>1</sup> [https://rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence?\\_ga=2.83773334.1046987310.1733176559-1151518425.1733176559](https://rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence?_ga=2.83773334.1046987310.1733176559-1151518425.1733176559)

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

upon reporting sexual harm by her stepfather was discouraged by her mother from reporting the harm because the mother was financially reliant on the stepfather. Our current Protection from Abuse statute could put a child's ability to file for court protection solely in the hands of a single parent, who could be the person abusing the child.

To truly address this sexual abuse, we cannot rely on parents to self-report abuse within their own families. We must allow minors to access the court system directly and seek protection from abuse. Many minors likely can and will continue to have a parent or guardian file on their behalf, as is appropriate. However, permitting minors to file directly allows a court to intervene sooner and more efficiently in those cases where an allegation of sexual assault must be addressed within the family.

For these reasons, we support the bill. Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 950 and 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>3</sup> Each year, 14,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.<sup>4</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 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*

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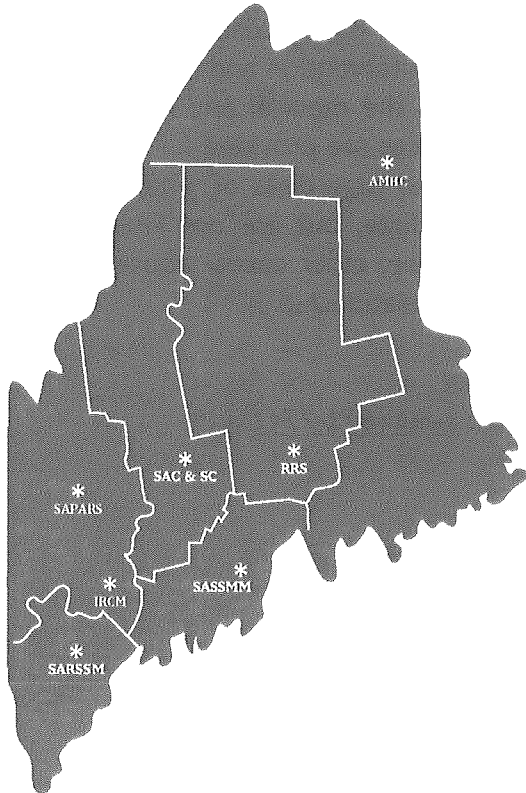
<sup>3</sup> Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

# **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 •  
amhsexualassaultservices.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

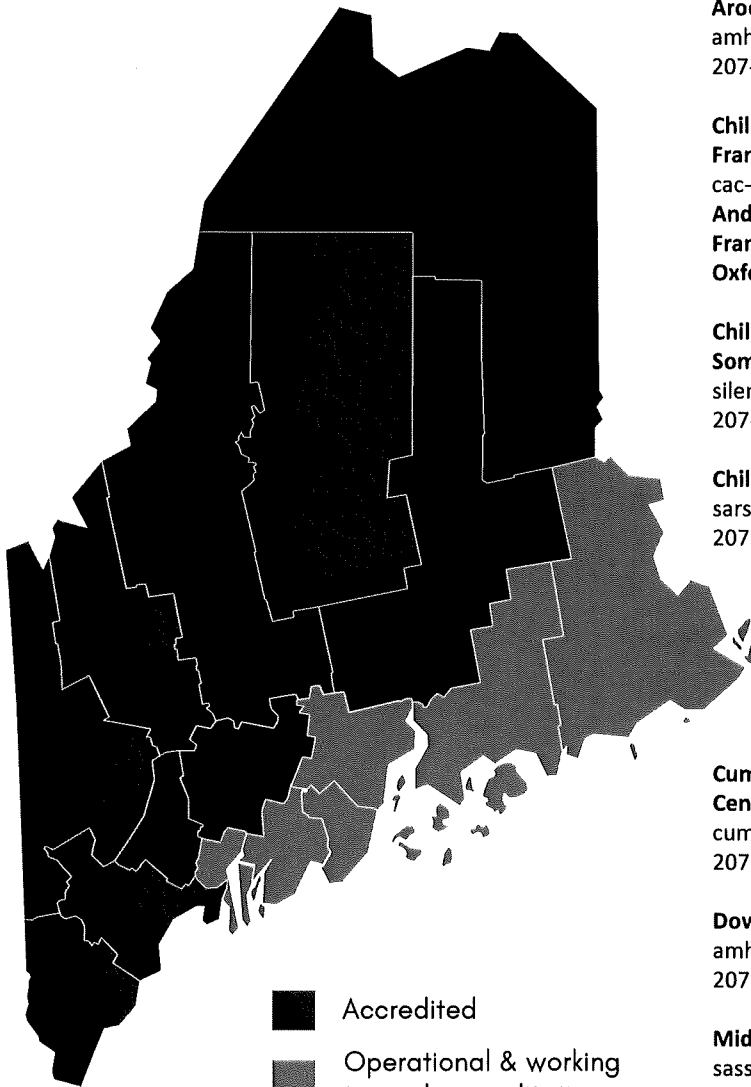
Penobscot Indian Nation, Domestic & Sexual Violence  
Advocacy Center • 207-631-4886



MAINE NETWORK OF

## CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTERS

# Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



Accredited



Operational & working  
toward accreditation

### **Aroostook County Children's Advocacy Center**

[amhcsas.org](http://amhcsas.org)

207-472-6134

### **Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties**

[cac-afn.org](http://cac-afn.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](http://silentnomore.org/about-our-cac)

207-861-4491

### **Children's Advocacy Center of York County**

[sarsmm.org](http://sarsmm.org)

207-459-2380

### **Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Center**

[cumberlandcountycac.org](http://cumberlandcountycac.org)

207-879-6160

### **Downeast Children's Advocacy Center**

[amhcsas.org](http://amhcsas.org)

207-255-3687

### **Midcoast Children's Advocacy Center**

[sassmm.org](http://sassmm.org)

207-522-7162

### **Penquis Children's Advocacy Center**

[penquiscac.org](http://penquiscac.org)

207-974-2469