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MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

March 18, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Elizabeth Ward Saxl, 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 769, "An Act to An Act Regarding Access to Behavioral Health Supports for Adults with Certain Disabilities." Thank you to Sen. Ingwersen for sponsoring this important legislation.

We know firsthand the impact that bodily autonomy and empowerment have on the survivors we serve, which is why I am here today to express MECASA's strong support for LD 769.

The distressing reality is that individuals with disabilities are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing sexual violence than their non-disabled peers. In fact, national studies estimate that almost 80% of people with disabilities are sexually assaulted on more than one occasion, and 50% of those experienced more than 10 victimizations.¹ This risk is compounded for those who are subjected to restraint, as these interventions often re-enact the loss of bodily autonomy and control reminiscent of abusive experiences. Restraints, particularly when used in an unchecked or punitive manner, can escalate the vulnerability of individuals with disabilities to further victimization, placing them at an even higher risk of sexual violence.

¹ Sobsey, D., Doe, T. (1991). Patterns of sexual abuse and assault. *Sexuality and Disability*, 9(3), 243-259

During a recent needs assessment conducted in collaboration with Disability Rights Maine, Speaking Up For Us (SUFU), the Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP), and the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA), we heard directly from adults living with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have experienced sexual violence. Their voices made it clear that the use of physical restraints exacerbates the trauma that survivors of abuse have endured. For many, the act of restraint triggers painful memories of violence and victimization, amplifying the psychological harm they have already suffered.

Eliminating the use of planned restraint is not just a matter of improving care—it is a matter of preventing harm. By ending the use of restraints, we take a critical step toward protecting individuals with disabilities from traumatization and reducing their exposure to further abuse by centering bodily autonomy. We must prioritize the safety, dignity, and well-being of individuals with I/DD, and part of that is ending these harmful practices.

For these reasons, we strongly support the bill. Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 769 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.² Each year, 19,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.³

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

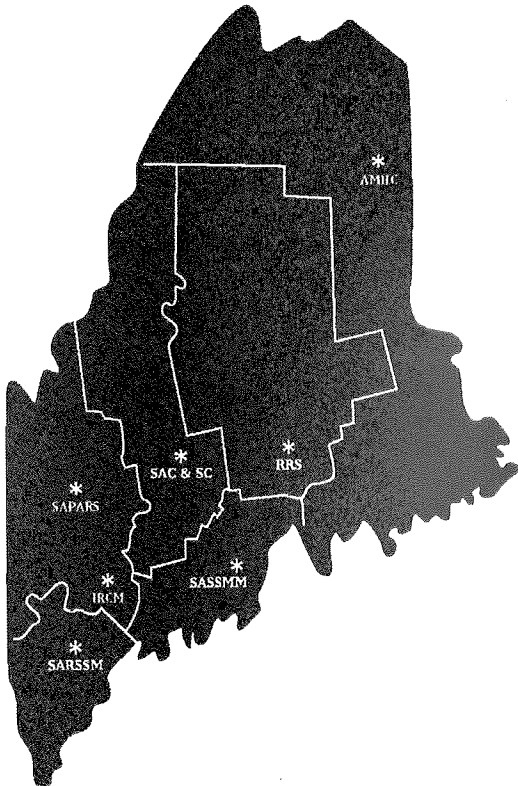
² Murray, C., Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2022). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine.

³ *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 •
amhcas.org

Immigrant Resource Center of Maine

Serving Androscoggin & Cumberland Counties • ircofmaine.org

Rape Response Services (RRS)

Serving Penobscot & Piscataquis Counties • rrronline.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

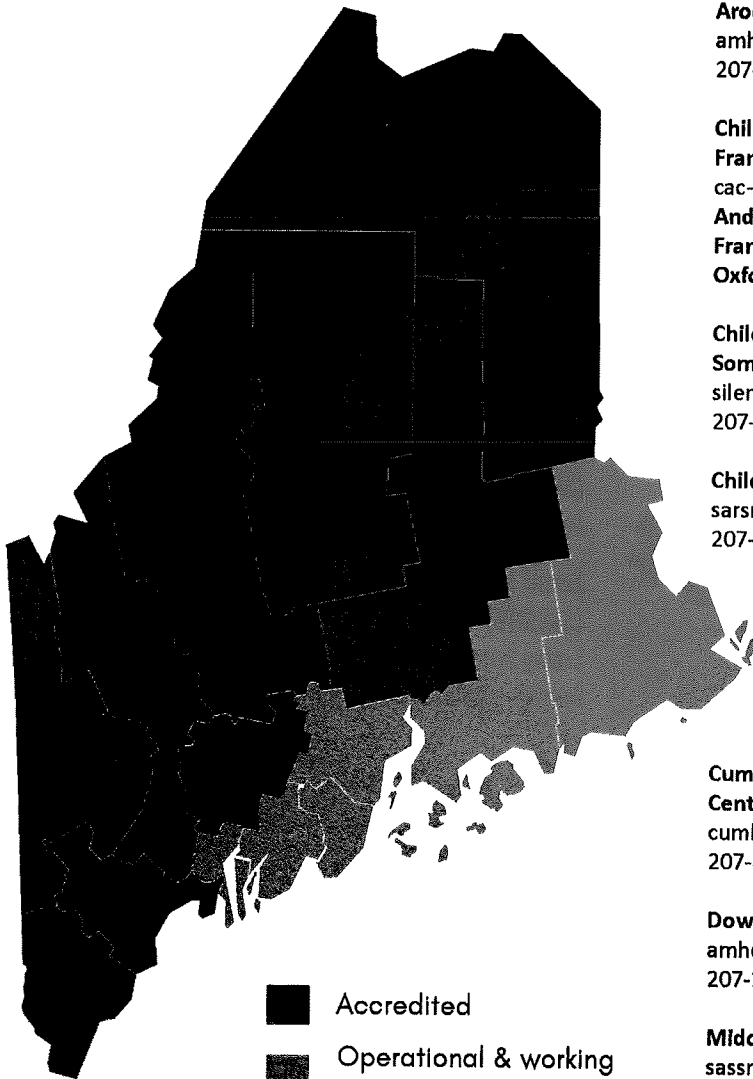
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



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-af0.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