

mecasa

MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

April 14, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, 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 385, "An Act to Protect Communications by Alleged Victims Regarding Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Cyberbullying or Discrimination from Litigation." Thank you to Senators Brenner and Carney and Representatives Sato, Dhalac, and Doudera for sponsoring this legislation.

Only 310 out of every 1,000 sexual assaults are reported to police.¹ That means more than 2 out of 3 go unreported.² For women in college, the number of reported sexual assaults are even lower - only about 20% report their assaults.³ Of the sexual violence crimes not reported to police from 2005-2010, 20% of victims did not report because they feared retaliation, which is the most common reason.

One of the many tools that people who cause sexual harm use to retaliate against their victims is suing them for defamation in court. As a result of this risk, Maine passed expanded protections for sexual assault victims to protect their rights to access a special motion to dismiss a defamation claim when they are sued after making a report of sexual harm to their school or workplace. This was an important step along with the general work this Committee and the Legislature did updating the entire anti-SLAPP law in Maine.

¹ <https://rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

However, our law, the Uniform Public Expression Protection Act, does not go far enough for many survivors. Many survivors of sexual violence are also sued for defamation for warning others in their community about the person who harmed them or for talking to a reporter or for simply sharing their story with friends or family. Survivors are in deep need of the expanded protections this bill would provide, including making it harder for those who cause harm to retaliate against them with legal threats and intimidation, helping support and encourage them to come forward and expose the behavior of those who harmed them; and providing relief to them in the form of reasonable attorneys' fees and damages for successfully defending themselves against meritless lawsuits.

For these reasons, we strongly support the bill. Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will also support LD 385 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.⁴ Each year, 19,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.⁵

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

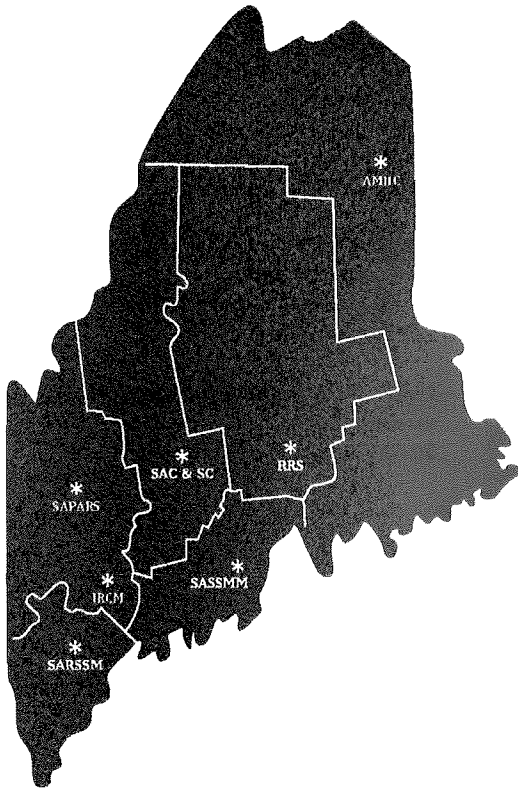
⁴ Murray, C., Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2022). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine.

⁵ *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 • 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 • 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

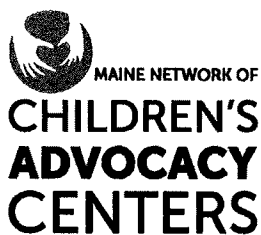
Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-551-3639

Houlton Band of Maliseets, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-532-6401

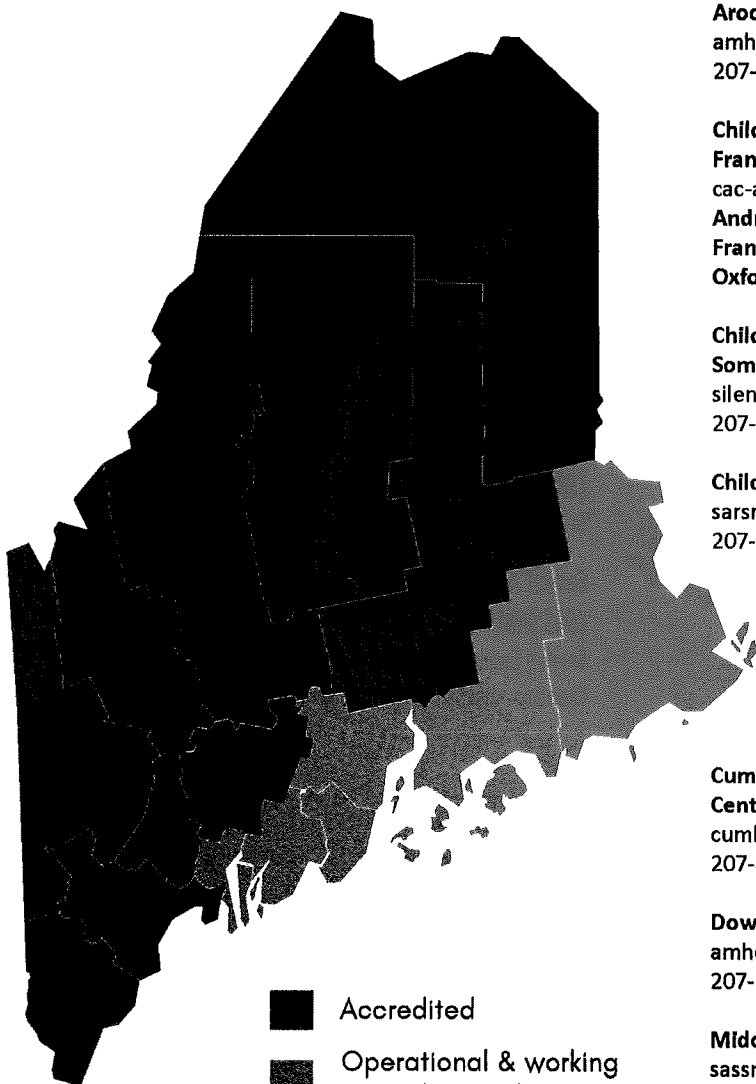
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



- Accredited
- Operational & working toward accreditation

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