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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 1427, An Act Extending the Statute of Limitations on Criminal Actions Involving Aggravated Sex Trafficking. Thank you to Representatives Henderson, Lee, Kuhn, Sato, and O'Halloran for sponsoring this legislation.

Survivors of sex trafficking endure profound trauma at the hands of individuals who manipulate, threaten, and maintain coercive control. Traffickers intentionally create hurdles that make it incredibly difficult for victims to report their situations to law enforcement, particularly during and in the short-term aftermath of a trafficking experience. This is a deliberate part of the strategy to maintain control. Because trafficking experiences often require that survivors spend long periods of time—often *years*—in survival mode, the impact of this trauma rarely ends when the trafficking stops. For example, even after survivors manage to leave trafficking experiences, many continue to struggle with the physical and psychological effects of abuse, economic instability, difficulty obtaining housing, substance use disorder, and an inadequate social support network. It is no small feat to rebuild one's life after this type of violent trauma.

Even so, under current Maine law, survivors have just six years to report their traffickers and initiate criminal proceedings. For many, that is simply not enough time. Psychological trauma, fear of retaliation, insufficient resources, and lack of support can all delay a survivor's ability to step forward. Many do not even recognize they were trafficked until years later, once they have had the time, distance, and support to process their experiences. By the time they are ready to seek justice, the opportunity may have already passed.

We already acknowledge in Maine law that serious crimes with lasting effects on survivors deserve an extended statute of limitations. For example, the law rightly allows adult survivors of gross sexual assault and unlawful sexual contact twenty years to report what happened to them. Survivors of

aggravated sex trafficking deserve the same consideration, and their path to justice should not be cut short by an arbitrary deadline that fails to account for the realities of their experience.

Additionally, increasing the statute of limitations will enhance law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases. Trafficking networks often take years to unravel, and most victims are more willing and better able to participate in an investigation once they feel secure. Given the importance of victim witness testimony, extending the time frame for prosecution increases the likelihood that law enforcement can build persuasive cases, gather critical evidence, and ensure that justice is served.

And yet, this bill is not just about holding traffickers accountable—it is about affirming that we see and support survivors. While the vast majority will never report their experiences, we must be prepared to respond with care to those who do. Extending the statute of limitations will allow them to pursue justice on their terms, when they are ready. It will send a clear message that our legal system recognizes the complexity of trauma and will not turn its back on those who need more time to come forward.

For these reasons, we support LD 1427 and urge you to do the same. Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to try to answer any questions you may have.

About Maine's Sexual Assault Service Providers

One in five Mainers will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.¹ Each year, 19,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.²

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

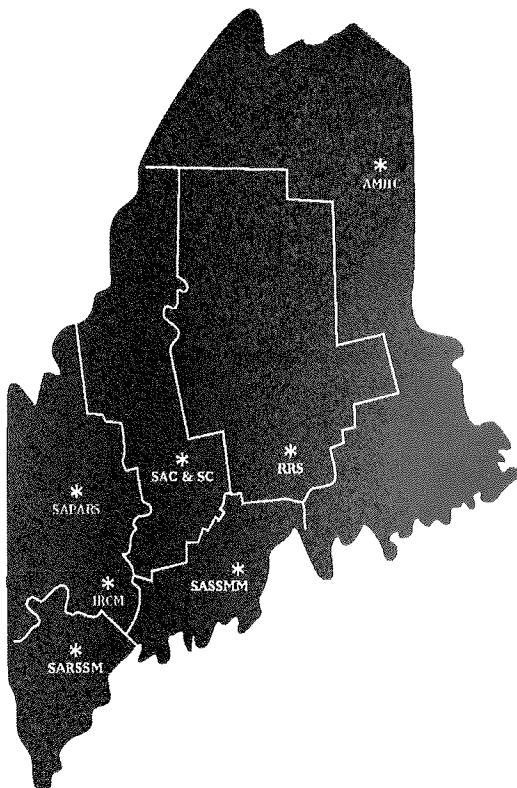
¹ Murray, C., Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2022). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine.

² *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

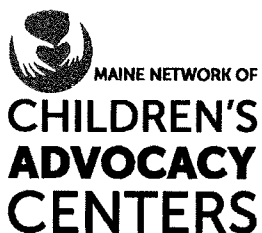
Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-551-3639

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

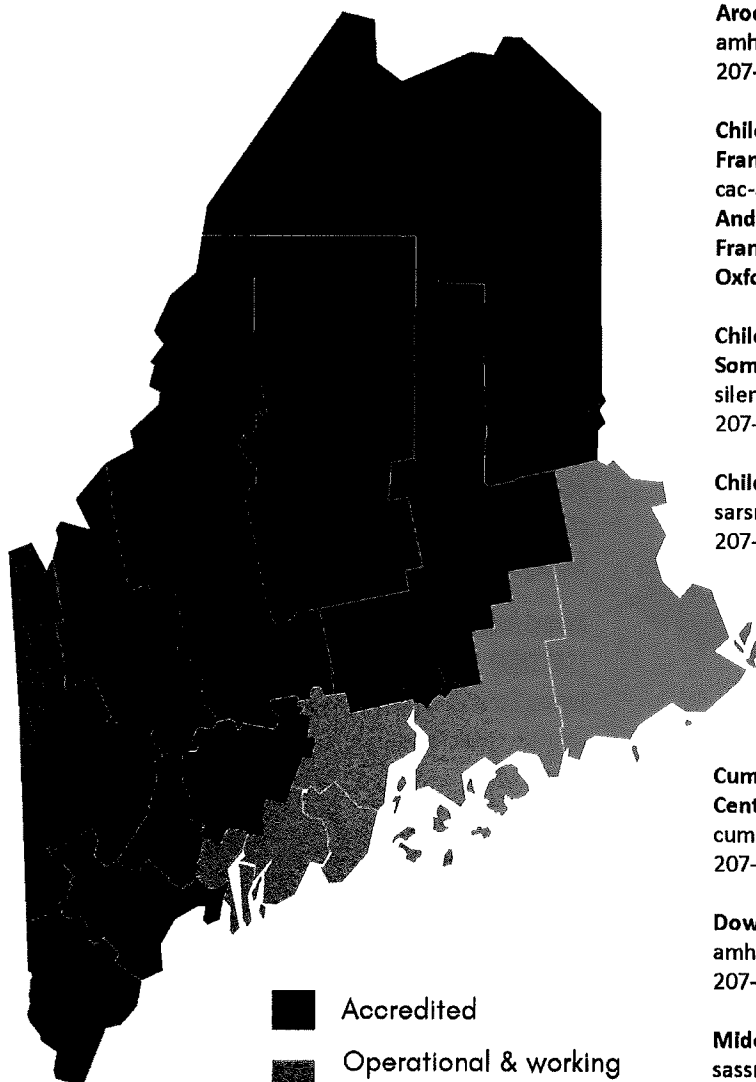
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

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-afo.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