

May 7, 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 1425, "An Act to Improve Access to Sustainable and Low-barrier Trauma Recovery Services." Thank you to Senator Rotundo for sponsoring this important legislation.

Each day, Maine people experience life-changing traumatic events. As you well know, vehicle crash data, suicide rates, and reported crimes only begin to scratch the surface of traumatic experiences and their impacts on our communities.

Each number represents many people: those experiencing the event, their loved ones, people they work with, witnesses, first responders, mental health providers, and entire communities. The ripples are vast. Unaddressed trauma has costly impacts on the health, productivity, and resiliency of communities. Those impacts range from subtle to dangerous and destructive.

Victims' services are critical infrastructure for safer, healthier communities. People who receive support after a traumatic experience are less likely to experience long-term mental health issues, housing instability, or cycles of violence.

And we know that trauma does not end when the headlines do. Survivors, families, and communities face lasting impacts long after a traumatic event. Ongoing, accessible support prevents re-traumatization, reduces isolation, and allows people to heal in community.

Since opening in 2023, the Maine Resiliency Center has served over 500 Mainers from 60 Maine communities—victims, families, witnesses, first responders, and other professionals who serve victims and survivors. The MRC’s peer-informed, low-barrier approach means people get help when they need it most, without delay or red tape, much like the services Maine’s sexual assault support centers. We see the MRC’s efforts as services that add to the landscape of support necessary to keep Maine people healthy, safe, and productive.

We know that during a time of significant change and uncertainty, state budget funding is tight. Victim service providers know all too well the ways we must patch together scarce funds to support survivors. It is difficult to quantify the savings that our collective services provide to the State, but we do know that our services provide support that people cannot find elsewhere and avoid greater costs down the road.

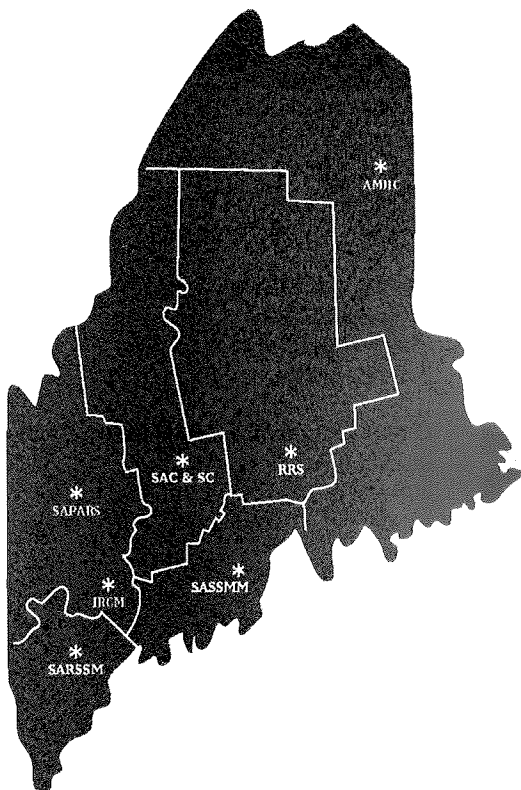
And while I’m sure many of us felt a sense of “that will never happen here” before October 25, 2023, I’m equally sure that we want all of our loved ones - in a time of need and trauma - to have access to what they need. The MRC’s services have become critical to the fabric of our services here in Maine. We urge the Legislature to see the infrastructure the MRC has created not just as a past achievement, but as a foundation worth building on and continuing to invest in.

For these reasons, we strongly support the bill. Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 1425 and would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

mecasa

MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

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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 •
amhesas.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

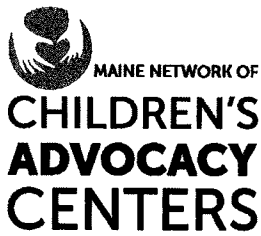
Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-551-3639

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

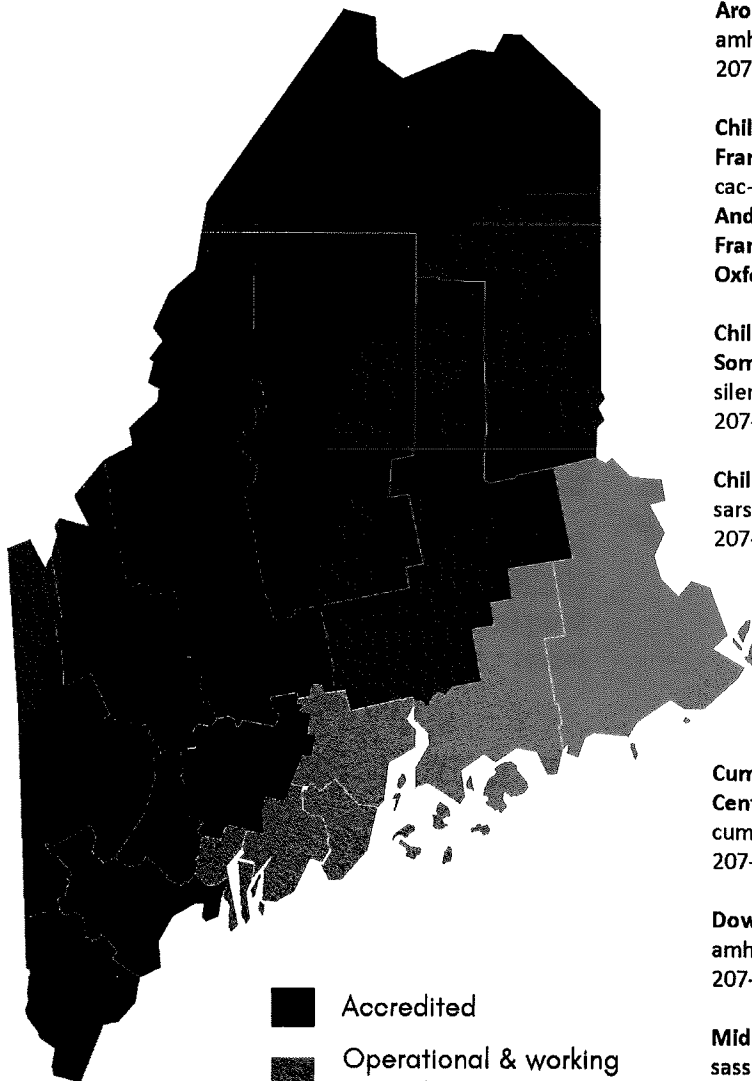
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



Aroostook County Children's Advocacy Center
amhcsas.org
207-472-6134

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