

May 12, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the 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 1805, An Act to Establish a Post-conviction Review Process for Crimes Committed by Victims of Sex Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. Thank you to Senator Talbot Ross for sponsoring this legislation.

MECASA is committed to exploring ways that the criminal justice system can better support *everyone* who has experienced sexual harm. Our commitment to survivors is core to our mission, and yet we have long understood that people who experience sexual harm may have for a variety of reasons caused harm.

Many survivors of trafficking and exploitation experience sexual harm, trauma, or significant health issues prior to their trafficking or exploitation. For example:

- 83% experience poverty;
- 96% experience abuse (physical, sexual, emotional); and
- 93% experience substance abuse and mental health challenges.¹

In addition, we know that survivors of trafficking and exploitation disproportionately end up in the criminal justice system. Roughly 40% of respondents reported some kind of criminal record as a

¹ <https://polarisproject.org/national-survivor-study/>

result of their trafficking experience.² Of those who had a criminal record, 90% reported that some or all of their records were related directly to their exploitation.³ Charges that are commonly associated with trafficking include theft, drug possession, and prostitution, all of which can be the direct result of force or coercion by a trafficker.

Maine is in the minority of states in not having specific trafficking related criminal records relief.⁴ As we know, this can impact trafficking survivors' ability to maintain employment, access housing, and be granted visitation or parental rights in family court.⁵

Because it is an injustice to be penalized for victimization, MECASA strongly supports this bill allowing for broad post conviction relief for survivors of exploitation and trafficking.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 1805 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.⁶ Each year, 14,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.⁷

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

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Of those who had a criminal record, 90 percent reported that some or all of their records were related directly to their exploitation.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

⁷ *Id.*

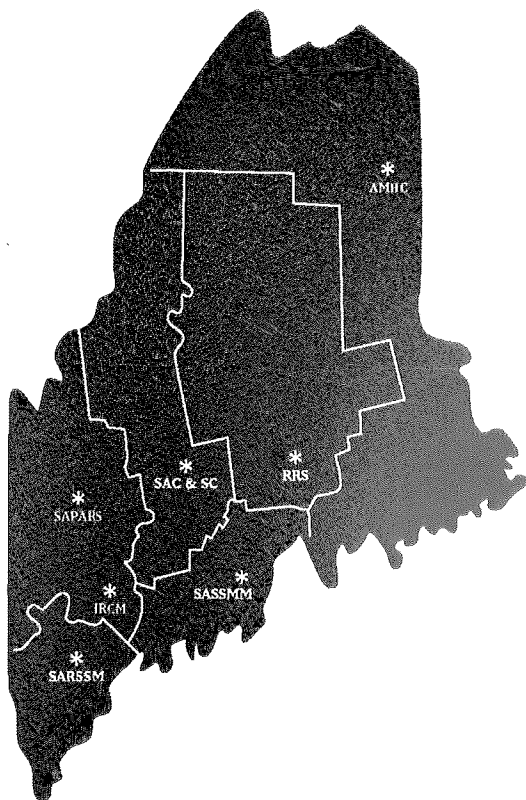
violence they experienced. Types of sexual violence include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment and gender-based bullying, child sexual abuse, elder sexual abuse, stalking, sex trafficking, and sexual violence within an intimate partner relationship.

24/7 Confidential
Maine Sexual Assault Helpline: 1-800-871-7741

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 •
amhcsexualassaultservices.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

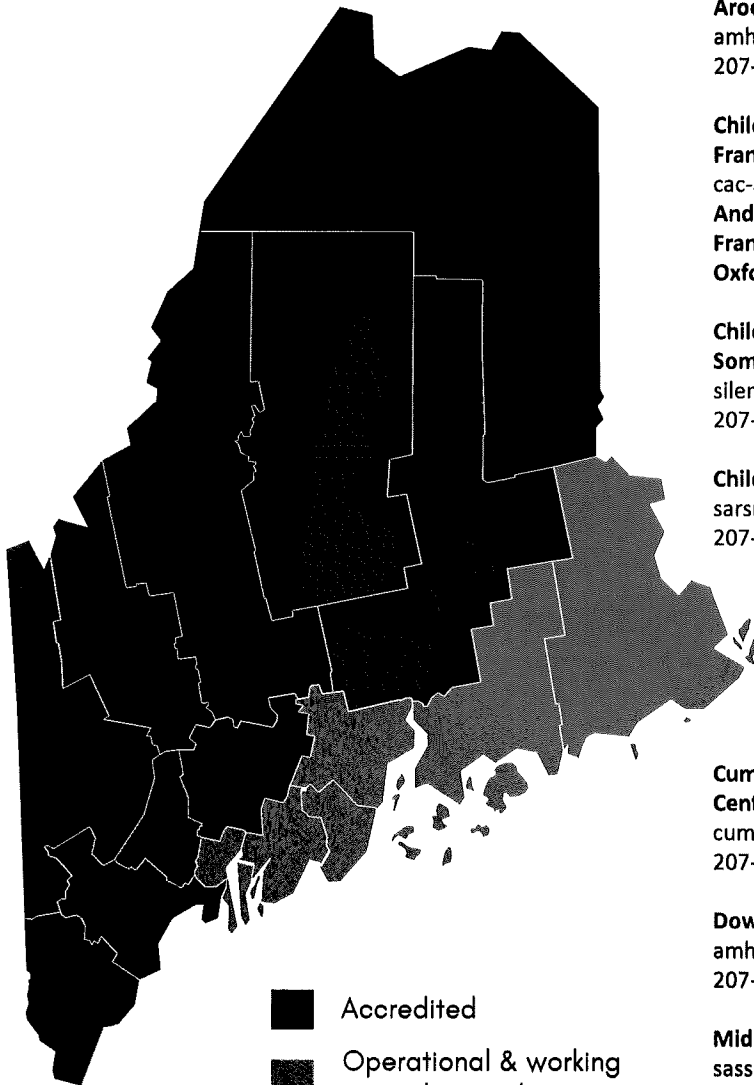
Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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
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