

# **mecasa**

## **MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT**

May 16, 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 1832, "An Act to Clarify Available Relief for the Protection of At-risk Children." Thank you to Senators Bailey and Carney and Representatives Arata, Kuhn, Lee, and Sinclair for sponsoring this legislation.

As practitioners across Maine have worked on more special findings cases<sup>1</sup> over the past several years, we have seen many children that have experienced extreme sexual violence. Some of the children have been sexually assaulted during the commission of war crimes, at detention centers, or as political prisoners. This bill clarifies procedures for judges to issue orders providing protections to these at-risk noncitizen children who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by their parents or other family members. These orders are also an important step in applying for federal Special Immigrant Juvenile classification, an immigration process that helps vulnerable children access protection from deportation.

The effects of child sexual abuse can be long-lasting and affect the victim's mental health. Victims are more likely than non-victims to experience mental health challenges. Specifically, victims are:

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<sup>1</sup> Special Immigrant Juvenile classification or status ("SIJ") is a form of humanitarian immigration relief that provides a pathway to lawful permanent residence for children up to age 21 in the United States who have suffered abuse, abandonment, neglect, or a similar circumstance, by one or both parents.

<https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-US/eb4/SIJ>.

- About 4 times more likely to develop symptoms of drug abuse;
- About 4 times more likely to experience PTSD as adults; and
- About 3 times more likely to experience a major depressive episode as adults.<sup>2</sup>

It is vital that the courts have clarity in the law to ensure that they can make findings about this abuse in order to provide all available forms of support and relief to these child victims.

For these reasons, we support the bill. Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 1832 and would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

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### **About Maine's Sexual Assault Service Providers**

One in five Mainers will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> Each year, 14,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.<sup>4</sup>

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*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>.

<sup>3</sup> Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

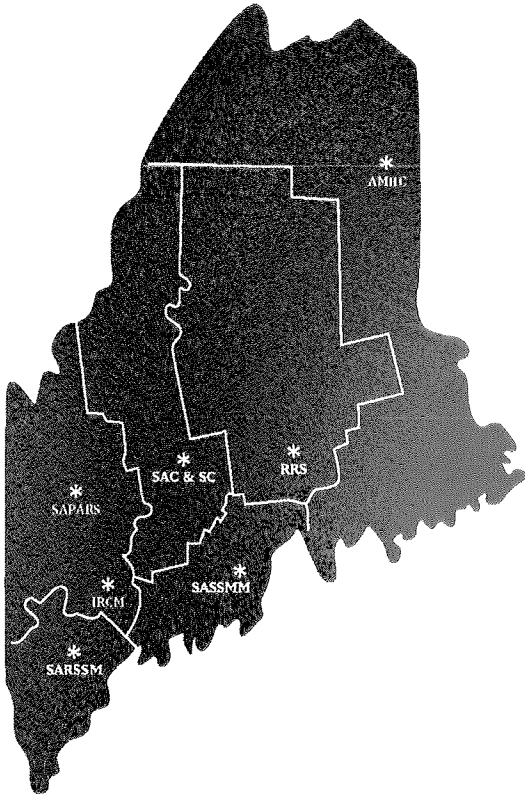
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



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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 •  
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

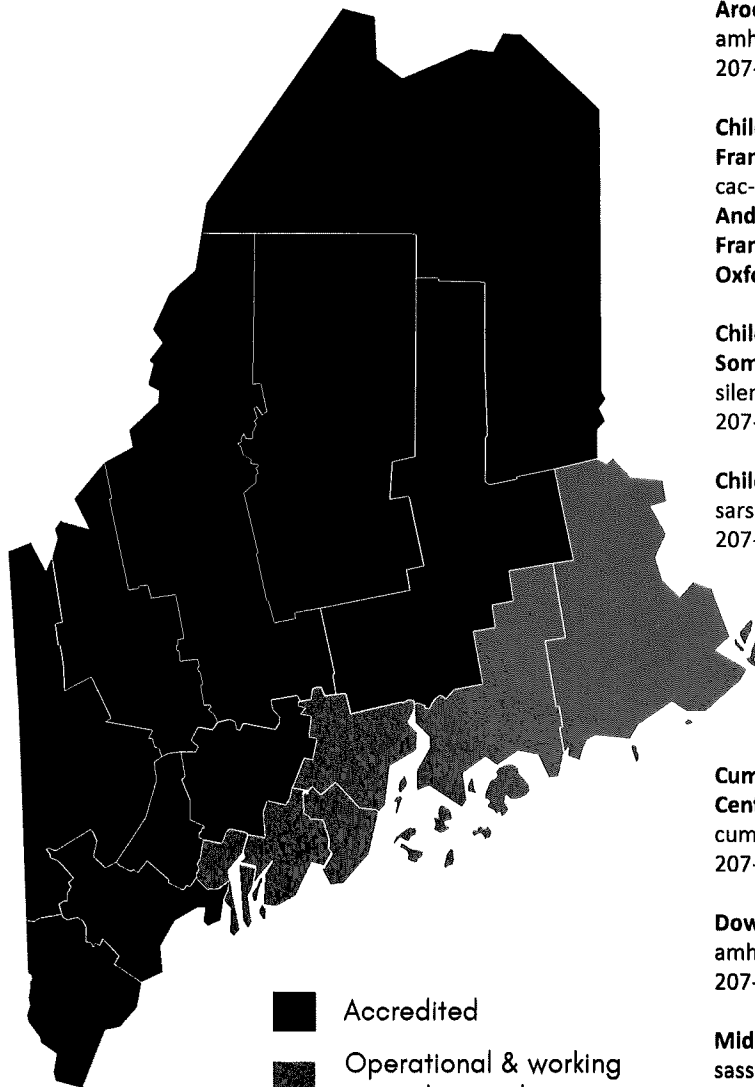
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual  
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917



Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



## **Maine'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-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