

mecasa

MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

May 19, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary:

My name is Elizabeth Ward Saxl, 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 1978, An Act Regarding Government Liability Related to Sexual Acts Toward Minors. Thank you to Assistant Leader Gramlich for sponsoring this legislation.

This bill does two important things—it creates an exception to governmental immunity in cases of child sexual abuse, and it expands the statute of limitations for cases against governmental entities.

First, it is important that all survivors have a path to healing and justice, regardless of the status of the person who caused them harm. Although our current Children's Advocacy Center data indicates that the majority of those who sexually harm children in Maine are family or household members, we know that there are a number of children harmed by other trusted adults in their lives. Access to civil justice is important both to create a public record of harm and also to alleviate the real financial costs that survivors bear—which are on average over \$120,000 across their lifetime.¹ Justice should not be unavailable because of the occupation of the person who caused harm.

Second, expanding the statute of limitations is also vitally important. Sexual assault of children is extremely prevalent in our society, but the vast majority of incidents (86%) go unreported at the time.²

¹ <https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/cost-rape>

² Kilpatrick, D.G., Saunders, B.E., and Smith, D.W. *Youth Victimization: Prevalence and Implications*. Washington D.C.: National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 2003.

There are many reasons a victim may choose not to tell anyone about the abuse or report it to law enforcement. This is especially true when the victim is a young child. In most of these cases, the perpetrator is someone known to the child, such as a trusted adult. Child sexual assault victims know the person who harmed them 90% of the time³. Along with the confusion a child may experience as a result of being harmed, they are also often fearful of what will happen to them if they disclose the abuse. Many people who harm children use threats and intimidation to silent young victims.

Often, it is not until survivors are older and have a better understanding that what happened to them and that it is their fault, that they may also have the courage to take a step towards talking about the abuse and possibly seeking justice. For these reasons, we consistently support expanding the statute of limitations for child sexual assault in recognition of the realities of the harm and barriers to reporting.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope you will support LD 1978 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, 14,000 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

³ Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997.

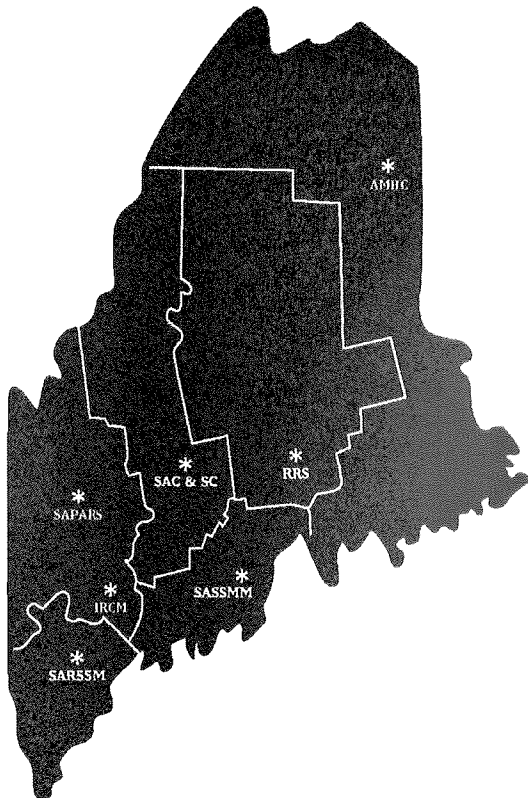
⁴ Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

⁵ *Id.*

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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

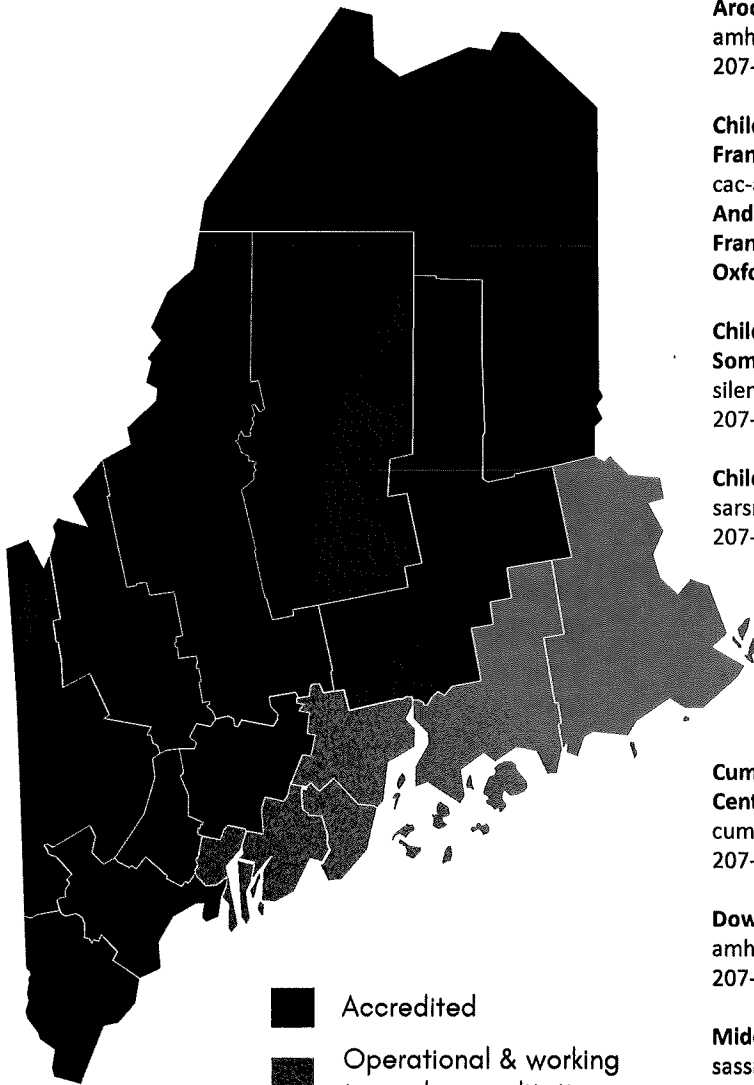
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



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

Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties
cac-af.o.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