

mecasa

MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

January 8, 2026

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

My name is Carlie Fischer 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 1941, An Act to Implement Recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole.

MECASA has approached parole reform with caution. Earlier proposals did not sufficiently address concerns consistently raised by survivors, nor did they include the level of investment needed in treatment, reentry supports, and community resources to meaningfully reduce recidivism or prevent further harm. Without those components, we could not support past efforts as safe or responsive to the needs of survivors.

Today, the statewide conversation has shifted in important ways. We are seeing genuine attention to survivor needs, a deeper commitment to trauma-informed practice, and broader recognition that community-based supports are essential to reducing recidivism and promoting long-term safety. In recent months, we have listened closely to survivors, advocates, and partners across the criminal-legal system. Their perspectives are nuanced, sometimes conflicting, and deeply human—but together they point toward the need for a parole system grounded in safety, dignity, and evidence-based practice.

As we continue to hear from survivors, whose needs, priorities, and feelings may change over time, our own perspective has evolved as well. We believe that, with the right resourcing and careful implementation, parole reform can be responsive to the complexities of sexual violence, trauma, accountability, and reentry. Furthermore, we believe that this bill incorporates many of those survivor centered pieces essential for a victim centered

process, and supervised, structured release is often safer for survivors and communities than sudden release at the end of a sentence.

Survivors of sexual violence do not view parole in a single or uniform way. Some see structured, supervised release as a meaningful pathway toward accountability and healing. Others fear that early release, especially if unexpected and under resourced, may threaten their safety or reopen trauma. We acknowledge that many survivors plan their lives around the certainty of incarceration timelines; changes can be destabilizing, and participating in parole hearings can be profoundly retraumatizing without thoughtful preparation and support. When survivors fear parole, they do so for reasons that are valid and grounded in lived experience. Additionally, trauma is present at every point in the criminal justice system, and many people who are incarcerated are also survivors of sexual violence.

A survivor-centered parole system must include comprehensive, accessible notification processes, options for participation that minimize re-traumatization, thoughtful safety planning, and coordinated support. When designed with care, parole can reduce harm by offering a supervised, evidence-based path toward rehabilitation; it is a structured, accountability-based process, not a guarantee of early release. Further, the possibility of meaningful review can give people hope—an important motivator for engaging in treatment, education, and pro-social behavior, all of which are linked to lower recidivism.

Although we are here in support, we do want to raise that even with the thoughtful additions to victim voice and choice in this bill, the bill does not fully address the needs for a successful parole system. Successful parole requires strong community-based services for both those who have caused harm and those who have been harmed. The most recent Parole Commission acknowledged this stating that it “feels it is essential that any proposal to reestablish parole includes resources of victim advocate staffing necessary for post-conviction report, to ensure victim safety, and to prevent their re-victimization.” Victim services to support those who are harmed with continued healing and safety planning when the person who has harmed them rejoins their community are essential. A successful parole system also includes detailed provisions for a system of ongoing support in the community for those who were convicted of sex offenses. This would mean safety and healing, not only for the public, if parole is granted, but also for the person incarcerated and other community members who are incarcerated with the person who caused harm. Without treatment and support, the chances of further sexual harm are increased.

For these reasons, we support LD 1941. Thank you for your consideration. We 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. Each year, 19,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.¹

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

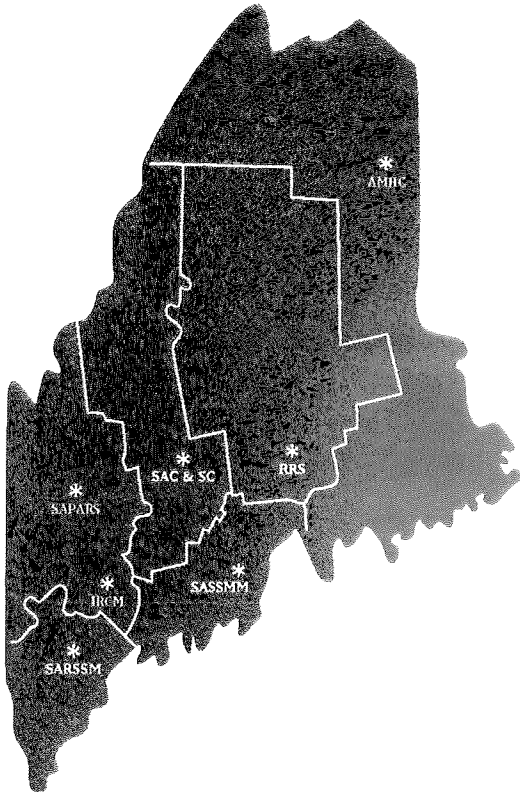
Maine Sexual Assault Helpline: 1-800-871-7741

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.

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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

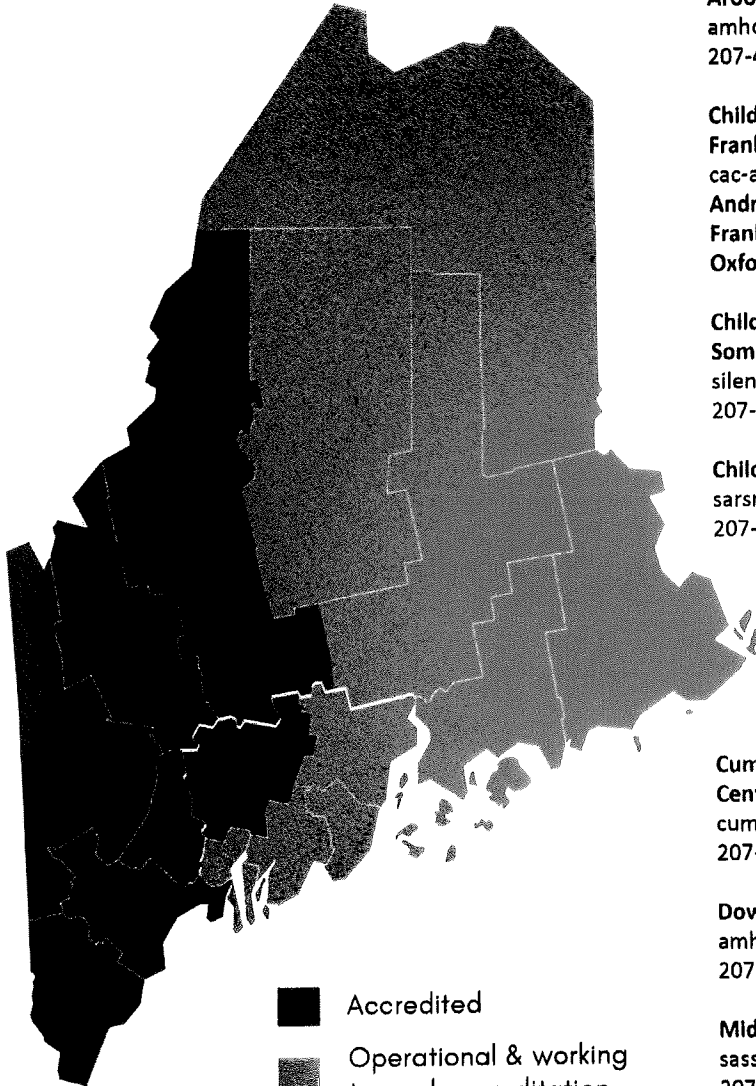
Penobscot Indian Nation, Domestic & Sexual Violence
Advocacy Center • 207-631-4886



MAINE 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-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

Perspective on Parole

Maine abolished parole in the 1970s, and since then, advocates for criminal justice reform have continued to call for its reinstatement. Over the years, MECASA has devoted considerable attention to understanding how such a change could affect survivors and what it would take to engage in this policy area with care and intention. As Maine again considers restoring parole, we want to be transparent about how—and why—our thinking has evolved.

How Our Perspective Has Evolved

MECASA has approached parole reform with caution. Earlier proposals did not sufficiently address concerns consistently raised by survivors, nor did they include the level of investment needed in treatment, reentry supports, and community resources to meaningfully reduce recidivism or prevent further harm. Without those components, we could not support past efforts as safe or responsive to the needs of survivors.

Today, the statewide conversation has shifted in important ways. We are seeing genuine attention to survivor needs, a deeper commitment to trauma-informed practice, and broader recognition that community-based supports are essential to reducing recidivism and promoting long-term safety.

This shift has prompted MECASA to take a fresh, more comprehensive look at parole. In recent months, we have listened closely to survivors, advocates, and partners across the criminal-legal system. Their perspectives are nuanced, sometimes conflicting, and deeply human—but together they point toward the need for a parole system grounded in safety, dignity, and evidence-based practice.

As we continue to hear from survivors—whose needs, priorities, and feelings may change over time—our own perspective has evolved as well. We now believe that, with the right resourcing and careful implementation, parole reform can be responsive to the complexities of sexual violence, trauma, accountability, and reentry.

Understanding Survivor Perspectives

Survivors of sexual violence do not view parole in a single or uniform way. Some see structured, supervised release as a meaningful pathway toward accountability and healing. Others fear that early release—especially if unexpected and underresourced—could threaten their safety or reopen trauma.

Research and lived experience underscore that:

- Many survivors plan their lives around the certainty of incarceration timelines; changes can be destabilizing
- Participating in parole hearings can be profoundly retraumatizing without thoughtful preparation and support

A survivor-centered parole system must therefore include:

- Comprehensive, accessible notification processes
- Options for participation that minimize retraumatization
- Thoughtful safety planning and coordinated support

Additionally, many people who are incarcerated—including those who have caused harm—are also survivors of sexual violence. Trauma often shapes the conditions that lead to incarceration. Our commitment is to all survivors, including those within correctional settings. Trauma-centered parole reform is one way to reflect that commitment.

Balancing Accountability, Rehabilitation, and Public Safety

Parole is not a guarantee of early release; it is a structured, accountability-based process requiring treatment, behavior change, and demonstrated readiness for safe reentry. When designed with care, parole can reduce harm by offering a supervised, evidence-based path toward rehabilitation. The possibility of meaningful review can give people hope—an important motivator for engaging in treatment, education, and pro-social behavior, all of which are linked to lower recidivism.

For parole to support safety, stability, and accountability, Maine must ensure:

- **Evidence-based, individualized treatment** in cases involving sexual violence
- **Clinically informed risk assessment**
- **Planned supervised reentry**, rather than abrupt release at the end of a sentence
- **Specialized reentry services**, including housing, employment supports, and mental health care

Supervised, structured release is often safer for survivors and communities than sudden release, especially when supported by clear expectations and comprehensive services.

Building a Responsible, Trauma-Informed Parole System

A parole system rooted in safety, dignity, and accountability must ensure:

Survivor-Centered Processes

- Clear, reliable notification
- Multiple options for participation designed to reduce retraumatization
- Safety planning and coordinated support throughout the process

Clinically Grounded Decision-Making

- Parole board members with expertise in sexual violence, risk assessment, and trauma
- Transparent criteria that foster trust with survivors and the public
- Careful balancing of rehabilitation efforts, survivor input, and community safety

Equitable Access and Community Well-Being

We must acknowledge that incarceration disproportionately affects certain communities. A fair parole system helps reduce disparities by ensuring:

- Access to treatment and reentry resources
- Transparent decision-making
- Recognition that communities include survivors, people who have caused harm, and all those connected to them

Our Commitment

MECASA believes Maine needs a parole system that is evidence-based, trauma-informed, survivor-centered, and properly resourced.

Our position is shaped by what we have learned about individual and collective trauma, the limits of long fixed sentences, the realities of reentry, and what survivors tell us they need to heal and feel safe.

We believe Maine can build a parole system that:

- Honors and supports survivors
- Holds people accountable for meaningful change
- Reduces harm through structured, supervised pathways toward rehabilitation
- Strengthens communities through safe, planned reentry
- Affirms the inherent dignity and humanity of everyone involved

We are committed to working collaboratively to help build a system that meets these goals.