

April 23, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor:

My name is Melissa Martin, 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 opposition to LD 1712, "An Act to Amend the Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program to Balance Support of Businesses and Employees."

LD 1712 would create a broader undue hardship exemption for small businesses who do a large amount of seasonal work. This would have a negative impact on survivors of sexual harm in need of safe leave.

Sexual violence happens year-round in Maine, including at times when it is inconvenient to have employees not at work. When survivors do experience sexual harm, there are often immediate and long-term needs for safe leave. In the immediacy, they will often need leave to get a sexual assault forensic examination, file a police report, or seek and obtain a protection order. In the long term, if their case does move forward to a criminal trial, there will be dates that they need to testify in court or meet with an advocate or prosecutor to prepare for court. Currently, these are all dates for which a survivor of sexual harm can obtain safe leave.

If LD 1712 passes, small businesses will be able to tell a survivor that needs this leave during the busy part of the year that it simply causes the business too great of a burden. This decision will not be appealable or reviewable. In short, a sexual assault survivor who is sexually assaulted during the winter in Maine will be able to access safe leave to meet their medical and safety needs, but a sexual assault survivor who is sexually assaulted during the summer or fall will not have those same protections.

In addition, this bill would disproportionately allow the exception in one of the industries where sexual violence is most prevalent. Sexual harassment in the restaurant industry is a significant and serious issue. As many as 90% of women and 70% of men report experiencing some form of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry, making this the industry that sees the highest percentage of reports.¹ Sexual harassment in the restaurant industry impacts workers economic stability and life outside of work.² One of the most effective measures to address this economic impact is paid leave.³ This bill scales back that important, protective support.

For these reasons, we strongly oppose the bill. Thank you for your consideration.

About Maine's Sexual Assault Service Providers

One in five Mainers will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.⁴ Each year, 19,000 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](tel:1-800-871-7741)

¹ Stefanie K. Johnson and Juan M. Madera, *Sexual Harassment Is Pervasive in the Restaurant Industry. Here's What Needs to Change*, Harvard Business Review, January 18, 2018

² ROC United, *Take Us Off the Menu: The Impact of Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry*, May 2018

³ The Restaurant Opportunities Center United Forward Together, *The Glass Floor: Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry*, October 7, 2014

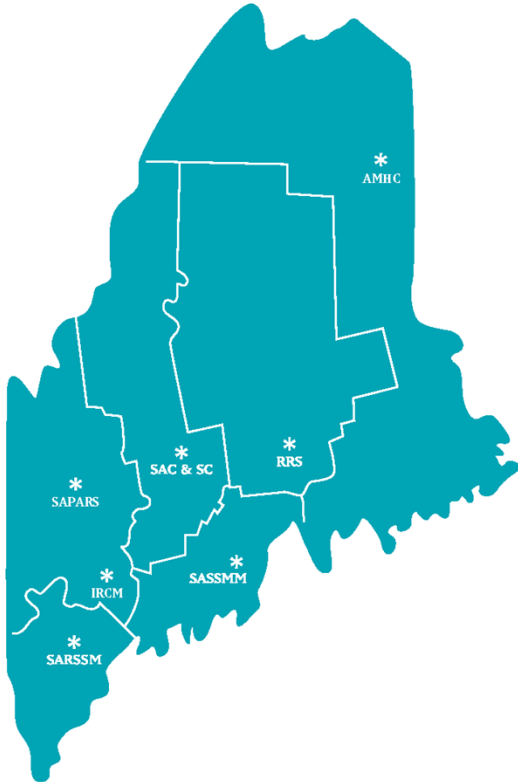
⁴ Murray, C., Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2022). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine.

⁵ *Id.*

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 Androscoggin, Hancock, & Washington Counties •
amhsas.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

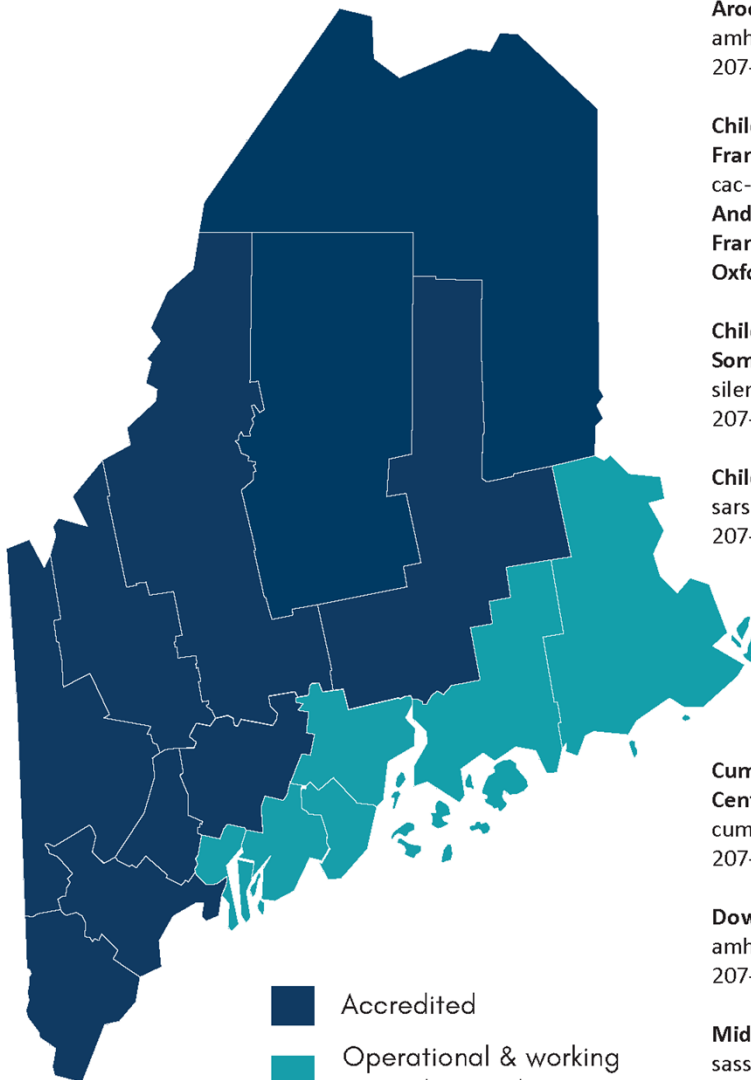
Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Domestic & Sexual
Violence Advocacy Center • 207-214-1917

Passamaquoddy Peaceful Relations • 1-877-853-2613

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



Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers



- 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