



March 21, 2021

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

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 victim service providers in your communities.

MECASA is here today in support of **LD 625, Resolve, Directing a Review of Crucial Needs and Lapses in Responding to and Preventing Sexual Trauma in the Maine National Guard.**

According to Muskie's Crime Victimization Survey, one in five Mainers will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.¹ And, each year, 14,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.² Unfortunately, we know that sexual violence occurs in in all of our communities and within institutions, like the National Guard. We also observe that institutions, from colleges to churches to our military, are prone to protecting themselves, sometimes at the expense of victims of sexual violence.

As a result, it is critical that our institutions are intentional about regularly examining the ways that individuals are at risk of and are experiencing sexual violence and what additional actions should be taken to prevent and better respond to victimization. We are grateful for the National Guard's support of this bill and for the great work that the Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) do every day on behalf of Mainers.

We would be pleased to assist with this effort in any way we can. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

¹ Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

² *Ibid.*

About Maine's Sexual Assault Service Providers

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

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)

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

⁴ *Ibid.*