

Effective, March 16, 2020

Dear Friends,

Here at Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine, we are actively taking steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) in our community, while continuing to center and prioritize the needs of survivors. I write today to provide important updates about temporary adjustments to our services to minimize exposure to and transmission of the virus, as recommended by the Maine Center for Disease Control. We will continue to monitor this emerging situation, adjust our response plan as needed, and will notify you when we are back to 'business as usual'.

Here is what you can expect at least till **end of May**:

- **Our Free, Private, 24-hour Helpline** - Our helpline advocates are available and ready to take calls at 1-800-871-7741. Our text chat service is also available between 8am-11pm, Monday through Friday, [here](#).
- **Hospital Accompaniments** - We are temporarily suspending our in-person hospital accompaniments, but we are still here to help! Our Helpline Advocates can answer any questions about what options are available following a sexual assault, and what someone might expect before going to the hospital for a SAFE (Sexual Assault Forensic) exam. We can also provide ongoing phone support throughout the hospital visit, and/or have an advocate from our Sexual Assault Response Team follow up to provide continued support afterwards.
- **Survivor Advocacy and Case Management**- Advocates will continue to support clients via phone meetings, as opposed to in person meetings, whenever possible. Staff will temporarily suspend in-person advocacy work in community centers, shelters, jails, prisons, etc., out of protection for our most vulnerable clients, and to avoid carrying the virus into those spaces.
- **Protection from Abuse Order and Court Accompaniment** - Advocates have been asked to minimize their time in court until the end of March. We will temporarily suspend court outreach in Portland and Biddeford Courthouses on 'Protection from Abuse Order' (PFA) days - although advocates can provide phone guidance and support for clients in need of PFAs. Staff will continue to attend court with current clients as scheduled, as we continue to carefully monitor court protocols around coronavirus. Community partners are encouraged to refer clients to our helpline for further support.
- **The Child Advocacy Center of York County (CACYC)**- All in-person services, including child forensic interviews, will be suspended throughout the end of March. All CACYC staff are available by phone and email during normal business hours to provide consult for case workers, referrals to services for families, one-on-one support for families and care givers, and safety planning and support. If a child needing CAC services can be kept safe without a full forensic interview and a

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minimal facts interview can be sufficient, we are more than happy to schedule these children for a full Forensic Interview once CACYC services can safely be resumed.

- **Community Outreach, Events, and Meetings** - As recommended by the Maine Center for Disease Control, SARSSM staff have been instructed to practice social distancing, and have been asked to refrain from attending community meetings, outreach opportunities, or events in person. They are encouraged to participate by video or conference call when appropriate to do so, and may otherwise have to cancel other commitments for their own, and others' safety. We have also chosen to reschedule all Sexual Assault Awareness Month events, including Take Back the Night. More details on that coming soon.
- **School-Based Education** - To protect children, school personnel, and our staff, we have decided to suspend all school-based education commitments through end of May, and will assess next steps at that time.

We hope that by taking these steps, we can do our part to minimize the spread of coronavirus in our community and would encourage you and your organizations to join us. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Gina Capra
Executive Director
Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine