



“You don’t make progress by standing on the sidelines whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas.” – Shirley Chisholm

MCASA is in the fight to end racism.

This statement begins, as it should, by recognizing the extraordinary renewed civil rights movement that followed the horrific murder of George Floyd and has since grown into a reckoning with the racism that has stained our nation’s history from the very beginning of its foundation. We denounce the killing of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and the countless acts of racist violence and hate perpetrated against Black people in our country every day, including by the police. We denounce racism in all its forms - both overt and subtle, individual and systemic - and re-commit ourselves as an actively anti-racist organization seeking justice for all people. Our hearts go out to all those who must bear the trauma of this racist violence and hate.

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault unequivocally supports the statement and the movement: Black Lives Matter. As a Coalition built around giving a voice and a response to the unheard victims of sexual assault, we can and do raise our voices in support of this plain and simple fact. Moreover, we offer this statement of support in order to give room and make space for those who have been leading the fight against these entrenched racisms and merciless crimes to speak in this moment.

We are a Coalition that raises its voice on behalf of victims, and we here raise our voice in solidarity with those who have been killed as a result of police brutality. Through the repeated testimony year after year, it is clear from horrifying tragedy after horrifying tragedy that our society has been too long ignoring a truth; a truth that is now plainly in front of our eyes with every photograph and video that has come forth demonstrating what our Black sisters, brothers, and non-binary siblings have been telling the rest of the world. The only candle lighting this darkness burns brighter now, as a society too long asleep appears to be rising. We raise our voice in solidarity and give space for those voices in this moment to tell their truth. It must be heard and reckoned with.

Even within our areas of advocacy to end all forms of sexual violence, we recognize that Black and Indigenous women who are victims of these crimes receive less police protection, less interventions,



fewer prosecutions of their assaulter, and less assistance.¹ Black suspects for these crimes, regardless of victim, are often policed more violently and prosecuted more zealously and successfully.² Given what we know about the frequency of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse, it is neither possible nor credible that these disproportionate outcomes are not linked to institutional racism. This must be addressed.

We raise our voice like many of our sister coalitions in support, and we are listening to the voices of those who are calling for change. We are listening carefully because we recognize that while we may not be the object of these protests, we are part of a society that too often fails to hear the voices of our Black colleagues and Black victims as well as all people of color. These lives matter. Their voices matter, and our community has too often failed to listen and take action in response to their calls of extraordinary pain and loss.

As part of being a Coalition that listens, we hear and affirm the voices of those who call for radical reform to policing and other institutions. We are attentive to the nature and substance of the changes being proposed and we stand in support of any effort to make meaningful and substantial progress. We bring to this listening our own experiences of bearing witness to case after case of rape victims treated poorly and without compassion, domestic violence victims who have found no protection from the police, victims of child sexual abuse who are not believed, and the twisted legal proceedings which turn a victim into the accused and offer no justice.

We note that it has taken centuries of fighting to establish that a man needs consent from his wife for sex. We know that Maryland continues to have laws that make it clear that marriage is a defense to some sex crimes, and we continue to advocate for repeal of these archaic and oppressive laws. In the United States 1 out of every 5 women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.³ Thirty-five percent of Black women experienced some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime, and 40% to 60% of Black women report being subjected to coercive sexual contact by age 18.⁴ Black girls and women 12 years and older experienced higher rates of rape and sexual assault than white, Asian, and Latina girls and women from 2005-2010.⁵ We have barely achieved a point in society where these crimes have begun to be recognized for their severity of impact. We support envisioning an idealistic future, but we advocate now in a world where the goal on the horizon is preceded by mountains yet ahead to climb.

As a long as someone is sexually assaulted every 73 seconds in the United States,⁶ we will stand for those victims and raise our voice on their behalf. As long as someone is suffering violence from a domestic partner every 3 seconds, we will stand for those victims; we will raise our voice to say

¹ US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Investigation of the City of Baltimore Police Department, August 10, 2016

² Becks, Allen J, Race and Ethnicity of Violent Crime Offenders and Arrestees, US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Statistical Briefing, January 2021. [Race and Ethnicity of Violent Crime Offenders and Arrestees, 2018 \(bjs.gov\)](#)

³ Smith, Sharon G., Zhang, Xinjian, Basile, Kathleen C., Merrick, Melissa T., Wang, Jing, Kresnow, Marcie-jo, and Chen, Jieru, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, November 2018

⁴ National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, <https://ujimacommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ujima-Womens-Violence-Stats-v7.4-1.pdf>

⁵ U.S. DOJ Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010," 2013

⁶ Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2018 (2019). (5-year rolling average to adjust for changes in the year-to-year NCVS survey data).



“enough!” on their behalf. As long as 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before they turn 18⁷, we will fight to support these survivors and hold offenders accountable. For all survivors, we are committed to giving whatever help we can to their needs, their resilience, and their restoration.

MCASA insists that the seriousness of these harms and the historical denial of these crimes be fully recognized. We cannot support any efforts that would regress our society back to a place where sexual assault is treated as something other than or less than a crime. Women have worked long and hard to make matters once considered private recognized as serious and life-impacting. Furthermore, we cannot support any approach that attempts to provide restoration for the victims of these crimes without accountability of the perpetrator. We fully appreciate the contributions of the members of law enforcement who have diligently partnered with us and learned how to best respond to survivors. We acknowledge that perpetrators often have their own trauma and we call for healing of that trauma as they are being held accountable for crimes committed. We exist to advocate for a world that acknowledges these crimes, prevents these crimes, and makes recovery possible for victims of these crimes -- we are committed to those ends.

Yet, there is a need to rethink how we respond to crime holistically and how we fund responses to crime, including policing, juvenile justice, and school resource officers who function as law enforcers against children and teens.

Yet, there is a need to look at exchanging the funding for incarceration to services that uplift and support healthier communities and safer neighborhoods with perhaps fewer police and more societal supports of a different form and approach and specific attentiveness to impact on Black and Brown communities.

Yet, we know that we need to call out racism within our own movement and ensure that women of color feel comfortable whether as employees in our agencies or as victims seeking services from our programs.

MCASA supports all efforts to eradicate the racial disparities in the policing and prosecution of sexual assault and domestic violence. We support efforts to reduce over-incarceration provided they protect the safety and security of victims, particularly victims of color. We support efforts to improve community safety through education and empowerment, social work, civil legal services, mental health provision, and community organizations. We support all efforts to improve our own movement and eradicate all racism and bias.

A change must come, including the divestment in over-incarceration and over-policing, and reinvestment in areas such as mental health, violence prevention, civil legal services, housing, economic justice, and elimination of poverty. We believe that this can be done concurrently with the understanding that some crimes require criminal accountability - particularly those crimes that are inter-personal and have historically been tolerated within American society. We also believe the anti-sexual assault and domestic violence movements must wrangle with their own history and choices to truly have an authentic conversation regarding societal reform.

⁷ Townsend, Catherine, Estimating a Child Sexual Abuse Prevalence Rate for Practitioners: A Review of Child Sexual Abuse Prevalence Studies, August, 2013



To that end we ask for recognition of the following and for the policies, funding, and action to support these principles:

- Racism and sexual violence are both civil rights issues and political issues rooted in oppression. They cannot be addressed solely or primarily through the criminal justice system, nor can the public health lens control our analysis. We must be data informed, but not data dependent. Ending racism, ending sexual violence, and ending oppression reflect our values as people regardless of statistics.
- Economically impoverished and working-class women, especially impoverished and working class women of color, must be at the centers of analysis, organizing practices, and leadership development. We need to recognize the role of economic oppression, welfare “reform,” and attacks on women workers’ rights in increasing women’s vulnerability to all forms of violence and locate anti-violence and anti-prison activism alongside efforts to reform the economic system.
- We must continue striving to increase accountability of offenders, including the offenders against women of color. While prison abolitionists have correctly pointed out that rapists and serial murderers comprise a small number of the prison population, we have not answered the question of how these cases should be addressed. The inability to answer the question is interpreted by many anti-violence activists as a lack of concern for the safety of women. We must protect women’s safety.
- Adoption and implementation of strong policies and services must include the choices of *all* survivors. This includes those who do not want police involved in their situation and for those who do want to access the criminal justice system. This requires continued support for specialized law enforcement training and resources so that survivors who want to use the criminal justice system can do so without fear of becoming re-victimized by the system. This requires functioning and fair civil justice options and counsel for survivors so they can navigate their legal options with the advice and support needed to make informed decisions. And this requires allowing survivors who want support without using the justice system to have access to the services they choose.
- Recognition that women of color are affected by state violence and the policies that address it.. Prison and police accountability activists have generally organized around and conceptualized men of color as the primary victims of state violence and, too often, women and non-binary prisoners and victims of police brutality have been made invisible by a focus on the war on our brothers and sons. This has failed to consider how women are affected as severely by state violence as men. The plight of women who are raped by INS officers or prison guards, for instance, has not received sufficient attention. In addition, women carry the burden of caring for extended family when family and community members are criminalized and warehoused.⁸ Several organizations have been established to advocate for women prisoners; however, these groups have been frequently marginalized within the mainstream anti-prison movement.
- Lift up and support women of color in the field, to ensure their voices are not just heard, but are leading and speaking. This must include:
 - Development of paths to leadership for Women of Color within our movement.

⁸ Swavola, Elizabeth, Biley, Kristine and Subramanien, Ram, *Overlooked: Women in Jails in an Era of Reform*. Vera Institute of Justice, 2016

- As Black, indigenous, and people of color are historically economically disenfranchised, ensure economic justice in all its forms; payment of a self-sufficiency wage for all staff, including frontline workers at sexual assault and domestic violence programs, is required.
- Being explicit that training on historical trauma and racism are integral to our mission and must be integral to trainings we present, not relegated to separate workshops and discussions.

To accomplish these goals, MCASA asks our policy makers to take these steps:

Support for Survivors

- MCASA asks that there be a reinvestment in community solutions including housing, civil legal services, economic justice, maternal health, and all health equity.
- MCASA asks that the State of Maryland create strong and equitable education systems for all children and these educational systems include information to prevent sexual violence, to end racism, and to promote justice for all.
- MCASA seeks immediate and long-term private housing for people fleeing harm, as well as financial assistance and the deployment of mobile outreach workers who meet survivors wherever they are.
- MCASA seeks continued support for core services and substantial financial investment in prevention of violence programs, including prevention programs explicitly addressing rape and other forms of sexual violence.
- MCASA seeks a rejection of approaches that too often label children as troublemakers or runaways, mothers as unfit, and far too many people as suffering from major mental illness, when they are self-medicating and having other unsurprising reactions to trauma. These labels are more quickly applied to people of color or people who are economically disenfranchised. Survivors need increased access to mental health, behavioral health, and substance abuse services. These services must be provided in a way that embraces and comforts the survivor, not the convenience of service providers or the latest performance measure imagined by funders.
- MCASA seeks support for sustainable funding for legal services for survivors to ensure that they can access both emergency *and* long-term remedies. Survivors need access to emergency temporary remedies, such as protective orders, but also help enforcing rights to help secure longer-term safety such as child support, housing, safe child custody arrangements, workers' rights, crime victim rights, and civil justice.
- MCASA seeks a focus on respecting survivors and an end to excessive data collection and questioning of survivors in the guise of evaluating already proven services.

Criminal Justice Reforms

- MCASA asks that there be an investment in ensuring that law enforcement understand historical racism, sexual assault, and domestic violence together with providing resources to law enforcement to develop strong community relationships and skills to provide expert responses to survivors of sexual assault – including when the perpetrator is an intimate partner or the victim is a child.
- MCASA asks that progress continue to eliminate the law's protections for perpetrators of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse.



- MCASA asks that the State of Maryland end marriage as a defense to any sex crime and reject the concept that marriage deprives a spouse of the right to say no.
- MCASA asks that the State of Maryland amend criminal laws to prohibit law enforcement from sexual activity with those they are investigating or who have asked for their help.
- MCASA calls on police unions to prioritize eliminating racism in law enforcement and to hold racist members accountable, including with termination.
- MCASA asks that law enforcement be held accountable for the use of excessive force and that there be reforms to qualified immunity for law enforcement and prosecutors.
- MCASA urges unions and management to work together to ensure that law enforcement have mental health assessments and support to officers on the frontline to help identify those who are a risk to themselves and others.
- MCASA seeks financial investment in solutions that ensure that, in addition to criminal penalties, community solutions to support potential and past offenders are honored, including juvenile intervention and other successful programs. Solutions need to disrupt pipelines to prison and end incentives to incarcerate.
- MCASA seeks investment in prison programs to re-habilitate offenders that are trauma-informed and assists offenders in managing behavior that is related to a trauma response together with stronger victim notification protections if an offender is released early. This must include establishing a Women’s Pre-Release Center in Maryland, and provision of services to the 86 percent of women who have spent time in jail and report that they had been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.⁹
- MCASA seeks an end to policing of families. Although Black children represent 33% of all children in Maryland, 52% of new out-of-home placements were identified as Black.¹⁰ It is imperative that we revamp the child protective system to ensure that poverty, misogyny, and racism are no longer used as an excuse to remove children from homes. For families that require foster care, ensure that there are enough resources that children of color are placed with family or in their community so that children do not have to give up their family, friends, and school.¹¹
- MCASA seeks continued support for child advocacy centers and other multidisciplinary approaches which give survivors a better chance of receiving a fair examination of their victimization and experiences.

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault stands in support of the movement to change the course of this history and create a just future free of racism.

⁹ *Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform*, Vera Institute, 2016

¹⁰ *Child Welfare Performance Indicators Report*, Maryland Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration (December 2019, UMD School of Social Work).

