

**Massachusetts Builds Capacity for Rape Crisis Centers to Respond to Incarcerated Victims:  
An Interview with Massachusetts SASP Administrator Marci Diamond**

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Like a handful of other states, SASP is administered in Massachusetts through the Department of Public Health along with Rape Prevention Education (RPE) funds, Preventive and Health and Health Services Block Grant Rape Set-Aside funds, and state sexual assault services funds. Each of the rape crisis centers that provides comprehensive sexual assault prevention and survivor services for each geographic area receives SASP except for one that is government-based at a state university serving a primarily rural county (that could change in future funding cycles as a result of VAWA 2013).

Marci Diamond, the administrator for SASP and those other funds in Massachusetts, had used a small portion of their block grant to do an assessment with the centers about PREA readiness. She wanted to, “find out what the centers in our state are currently doing around serving incarcerated victims, what are the challenges, what are the strengths.” She found out that some of the local jails, administered by county Sheriffs’ departments, contract with rape crisis centers to provide services but, “in a lot of places that isn’t happening.” So far, although the state DOC, which administers state prisons, is working with their state SANE program, they don’t seem to be working with rape crisis centers very much.

Marci has held an in-person statewide rape crisis center provider meeting at least twice a year for many years, as well as a number of teleconferences during the year, as a way to build capacity for rape crisis centers. She queries the programs and works with the state coalition to determine topics for these meetings. Because most of the attendees are rape crisis center directors, Marci builds meetings that are less about the nuts and bolts of front-line advocacy and more about organizational policy issues and exposing attendees to professional training resources available to bring to their staff and potential partnerships that they can take back and develop more in their local communities. Whenever possible, existing rape crisis center efforts are highlighted in this context as peer learning opportunities.

With the new guidelines under PREA, some rape crisis centers in Massachusetts were receiving calls from county corrections to develop services, so Marci decided to devote an hour of the most recent statewide provider meeting to a conversation related to prisons and brought in the outside trainer who was working on the aforementioned assessment project with the RCCs to discuss, “*Connecting Rape Crisis Centers with DOC, DYS, and County Detention Facilities & Building RCC Capacity to Improve Access and Services for Incarcerated Survivors.*” This capacity-building discussion training focused on an overview of both the state prison system and the county system and a social justice approach to advocating for incarcerated victims. She said the evaluations were outstanding, and many of the programs want to bring the trainer, Rev. Jason Lydon with [Black and Pink](#) to their local communities.

Generating rape crisis center interest in Rev. Lydon's offered and available local follow-up training and consultation was one of the goals of the session.

Marci believes it's important to embed an understanding of the state's SASP funds and work to serve incarcerated victims in a broader context:

*"When state funding was cut in 2010, we lost base core capacity for rape crisis centers and that's an incredibly important gap for SASP to fill, so we don't want to do an 'add-on' approach. We let the centers tell us how they want to use their SASP money because they are all in different places in terms of what they need it for so we aren't requiring them to use their SASP funds to work with incarcerated victims but we are giving them that opportunity, since they are expected to respond helpfully to incarcerated victims that may contact them Advocates should be there for an incarcerated survivor if they reach out.. We provide the training, because we don't want to add to their work, but to make it easier. Because when they get a complicated call from a prison, it will require lots of extra time and work if they don't have any background. We think the training can help them be more efficient. Also, for some it's a financial opportunity since some of the correctional facilities are offering contracts with the rape crisis centers for this work."*

Marci points out that SASP allows all of the centers to build their overall staffing capacity around sexual assault, so whether or not the specific advocate who's responding to the incarcerated victim is SASP-funded or not, the SASP funding is an essential piece of the puzzle to allow that work to grow.