

Massachusetts

Estimations of the scale, scope and cost of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) in the United States are alarming.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that approximately one in four girls and one in 20 boys will experience sexual abuse during childhood in US,² while the estimated lifetime cost per child sexual abuse victim is \$282,734 million.^{3,4} The good news is that CSEA is preventable. A range of interventions have been identified to help prevent child abuse and sexual violence from occurring in the first place and to minimize the impacts on survivors and their families.^{5,6,7}

Economist Impact’s Out of the Shadows Index, supported by World Childhood Foundation USA, was designed to shine a spotlight on state action—and inaction—to address CSEA. The assessment includes more than 170 metrics aggregated into 22 indicators and grouped into four categories to gauge the extent to which states have introduced essential measures to prevent and respond to this pressing issue. It aims to be a tool to highlight areas for prioritization, drive change, and benchmark progress.

Score	Rank
45/100	21/28

Background indicators	
Population (m)	7.00
Median household income (USD)	89,645
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	10
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	45
Female representation in state government (%)	31
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	20,376

State overview

Massachusetts has taken several important steps to tackle CSEA, including through the work of the Massachusetts Legislative Task Force for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse. To further enhance its efforts, more focus could be placed on building prevention capacity and promoting a trauma-informed response.

State spotlights

The Massachusetts Legislative Task Force for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse has produced **guidelines and tools for the development of sexual abuse and intervention plans** by organizations serving children and youth. It maintains an interactive website where these resources can be accessed at no cost.⁸

The RESPECTfully campaign is a statewide public awareness and abuse-prevention campaign promoting healthy relationships to young people and is the first initiative of its kind in almost 20 years. It is led by the Governor’s Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence and aims to help teens identify the escalating behaviors that lead to unhealthy or unsafe relationships and safely remove themselves from those relationships.⁹

Massachusetts has helped amplify survivors’ voices through a series of roundtables held across the state. These have provided opportunities for survivors of sexual violence to share their experiences of the criminal justice system and to gather input regarding several related legislative changes.¹⁰

Priority areas for future focus

Strengthen the legal framework against sexual violence by:

- Enacting a law that specifically criminalizes sexual misconduct by persons in positions of trust or authority, prohibiting adults from engaging in sexual activity with minors up to the age of 18 in such cases;¹¹ and by
- Adopting a clear and explicit statutory definition of sexual consent.¹²

Boost prevention capacity by:

- Mandating comprehensive sex education and HIV/STI instruction in public schools—including information about contraception and consent—that is evidence-based, culturally appropriate and inclusive of *all* students;
- Mandating age-appropriate child sexual abuse prevention education for all students in grades K–12 using evidence-based programs, including instruction on abuse that can be experienced online; and by
- Establishing regular, required training on child sexual abuse and teen dating violence for employees and volunteers of schools and other youth-serving organizations.

Ensure children have access to services of the highest standards by providing a statutory definition of a Children’s Advocacy Center¹³ (CAC) that is in line with or tied to the National Children’s Alliance’s *National Standards of Accreditation* and that clearly sets out the role of CACs in the response to allegations of child sexual abuse.

Promote a trauma-informed response by:

- Guaranteeing the sexual assault victim’s right to have an advocate present during a sexual assault medical forensic examination; and by
- Ensuring that children *up to the age of 18* have access to measures protecting against re-traumatization during criminal proceedings.¹⁴

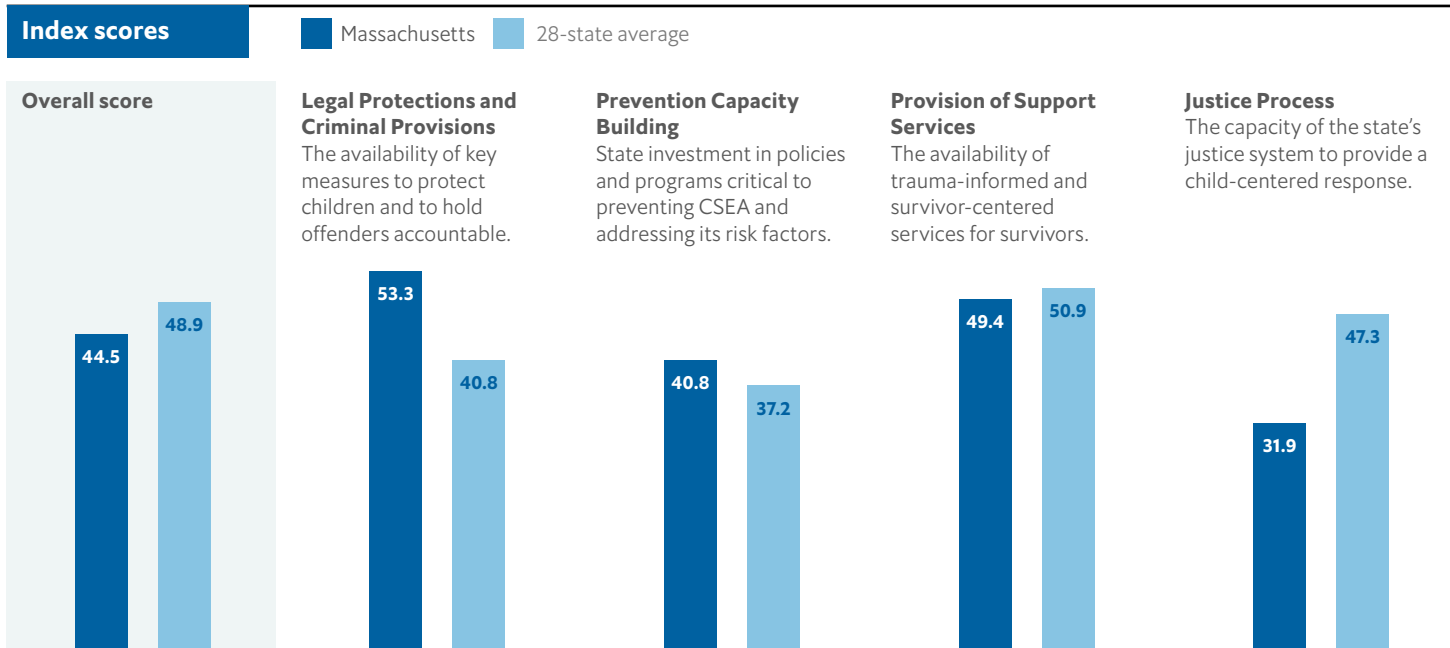
Support survivors’ access to justice by eliminating the criminal statute of limitations for all child sexual abuse crimes and the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse claims against all defendants.

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The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Massachusetts



Issues spotlights¹⁵

Creating protective environments			Building trauma-informed systems		
Mandated sex education and HIV/STI instruction	Sex ed / HIV/STI instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	Statute defining CACs in line with national standards ¹⁸	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comprehensiveness of sex education and HIV/STI instruction (if/when provided) ¹⁶	Scale of comprehensiveness	0/7	Statute requiring the use of CACs in suspected CSA cases, where available	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>	State funding for CACs: general revenue and special revenue	General revenue / special revenue	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mandated online sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mandated training for child protective services investigators ¹⁹	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Required school dating violence policies	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mandated training for law enforcement	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Required training on child sexual abuse (CSA) for educators	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mandated training for prosecutors	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Required training on CSA for youth-serving organization employees	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>	Preventing retraumatization in court: testifying by alternative means in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Educator code of ethics: appropriate teacher/student boundaries	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>	Preventing retraumatization in court: hearsay exception in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Addressing risk and protective factors			Supporting justice and healing		
Statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Medical care following sexual abuse: minors' authority to consent	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Child marriage laws	18 without exception / required proof of age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Medical care following sexual abuse: right to an advocate	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated parental leave	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rape kit reform	Some reform / full reform	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Non-discrimination statutory protections ¹⁷	Protection for sexual orientation / gender identity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legislated minimum wage above the low-income threshold	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Civil statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA claims	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income-eligible children with access to early head start	%	7.9	Revival or window law for expired civil claims	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	6.7	Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA ²⁰	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>	Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA ²¹	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Figure 2 features a limited sample of the data included in the index. For the full set of indicators and a detailed explanation of the scoring, sources and weightings, visit the [Out of the Shadows Index website](#) to download the project's white paper, methodology report and interactive model.

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Endnotes:

1. The index and profile may refer to specific forms of child maltreatment or sexual violence (eg, child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation) to distinguish between findings or areas of research.
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html#:~:text=Many%20children%20wait%20to%20report,States%20experience%20child%20sexual%20abuse>
3. \$282,734 is the average lifetime cost for female victims of non-fatal child sexual abuse (CSA). For male victims, it is approximately \$74,691 (although this lower estimate is likely influenced by the insufficient data available on productivity losses). The lifetime cost for victims of fatal CSA per female and male victim was estimated, on average, to be \$1,128,334 and \$1,482,933, respectively. All estimates pertain to the year 2015.
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29533869/#:~:text=Estimating%20new%20cases%20of,%241%2C482%2C933%2C%20respectively%2C%20and%20the%20average>
5. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CAN-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
6. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
7. <https://www.togetherforgirls.org/en/resources/what-works-to-prevent-sexual-violence-against-children-evidence-review>
8. <https://safekidsthive.org/>
9. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/respectfully-healthy-relationships-campaign-overview/download>
10. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/governors-council-to-address-sexual-assault-and-domestic-violence-final-report-2015-2022/download>
11. It should be noted that Massachusetts law imposes specific penalties in cases where a mandated reporter—which includes individuals in positions of authority/trust in relation to a child—engages in unlawful sexual intercourse or unnatural sexual intercourse with a child under 16, or indecent assault and battery on a child under the age of 14 (MA Gen. Laws Ch. 265 §§ 32A and 13B1/2).
12. This definition should include reference to consent being “freely” or “voluntarily” given.
13. Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) are organizations located throughout the US that help facilitate a multidisciplinary and child-centered response to CSEA. These centers bring together several of the key actors—law enforcement, child protective services investigators, medical and mental health professionals, forensic interviewers, victim advocates, and more—under one roof, helping to minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed and offering critical therapeutic and other support to children and their families.
14. Testimonial aids can help protect a child who has already been the subject of sexual abuse from incurring further trauma. This includes avenues by which child victims or witnesses of sexual abuse may testify by an alternative method outside of the courtroom, such as via closed-circuit television. Many states also have statutory exceptions for child hearsay—or the
15. The research for the 2024 index was conducted between March and September 2023. As such, the findings reflect the most recent available data at the time the research was completed.
16. “Comprehensiveness” is assessed based on the following standards: whether the state has a law or statewide rules, regulations or standards with the force of law requiring that sex education and HIV/STI instruction be evidence-based, medically accurate, culturally appropriate and inclusive of all students, and whether related courses are required to include information about contraception and consent.
17. This figure indicates whether statewide laws or policies explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in all of the following areas: employment, housing, and education.
18. “National standards” refers to the National Children’s Alliance’s National Standards of Accreditation.
19. These indicators consider whether the state mandates specialized training for child protective services investigators, law enforcement, and prosecutors on CSA and/or trauma at regular intervals (eg, every two years). A separate indicator assesses basic training requirements for mandated reporters in the state more broadly.
20. This indicator considers whether state law establishing eligibility for the state’s Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides an explicit time frame exception that is applicable to survivors of CSA (eg, minor victims of crime have up to the age of 21 to file a claim).
21. This indicator assesses whether state law establishing eligibility for the state’s Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides alternatives to making a police report for survivors of CSA (such as reports made to child protective services, a sexual assault counselor, or a CAC employee; a restraining or civil protection order granted to the victim; or records from a sexual assault forensic examination). Limited, time bound, or vague exceptions to this requirement were not considered.