

SAFE CENTER

JULY-AUGUST 2016

SAFE CENTER ADDRESSES HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Support. Advocacy. Freedom. Empowerment.

These qualities form the foundation for the new SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors that UMB recently opened with its *MPowering the State* partners at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP).

Through in-house services and collaborative partnerships, the center will provide direct assistance to U.S. and foreign-born adult and child survivors of sex and labor trafficking, with a particular focus on survivors in Montgomery County and Prince George's County, where UMCP — and the center — is located.

“These young people have survived betrayal and violence and desperately need this safe harbor to rebuild their lives,” UMCP President Wallace D. Loh, PhD, JD, MA, said at the center’s opening on May 9.

A new part of *MPowering the State*, the hugely successful structured alliance between UMB and UMCP that promotes innovation and impact through collaboration, the SAFE Center will see researchers from both universities come together to expand the scholarship on human trafficking. In addition, UMCP and UMB students will become the next generation of trafficking experts and survivor advocates.

“The University of Maryland, Baltimore is honored to partner with the University of Maryland, College Park to alleviate the devastating impact human trafficking has on our community, here in Maryland and globally,” UMB President Jay A. Perman, MD, said at the opening. “This partnership is an excellent example of how our two universities can work together to make each institution stronger and develop real-world solutions that benefit our communities.

“At the SAFE Center, experts from the University of Maryland School of Social Work and the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law will conduct groundbreaking research into human trafficking and will work closely with survivors to help them realize bright futures outside of this exploitative illegal industry. We are excited to see the innovative real-world solutions that are sure to develop from this promising collaboration.”

Traffickers prey on those susceptible to exploitation: homeless and runaway youth, undocumented immigrants, children in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The victims’ dire circumstances help traffickers keep them invisible, and many victims see no hope for escape or a fulfilling life after enslavement.



FROM LEFT, DR. LOH, U.S. SENATOR BENJAMIN CARDIN, STATE TREASURER NANCY KOPP, DIRECTOR ESSERMAN, CONGRESSMAN CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, AND DR. PERMAN.

The center’s *website* spells out how SAFE is “helping survivors of human trafficking to heal and reclaim their lives.” There are direct services for women, men, girls, boys, transgender individuals, foreign nationals, and U.S. citizens who have been exploited by trafficking. There is research to fill in gaps in knowledge on human trafficking. Plus there is advocacy to support and empower trafficking survivors and promote justice.

At the ceremony, officials from both universities, Prince George’s and Montgomery counties, and the state of Maryland launched the center, including Susan G. Esserman, JD, founder and director of the SAFE Center. Esserman, a partner at Steptoe & Johnson, is a leader of the law firm’s pro bono program on behalf of trafficking victims and has represented numerous survivors in Prince George’s County.

“Most people would be shocked to know the serious extent of the human trafficking problem in our Maryland communities,” said Esserman. “Vulnerable and marginalized people are being forced and coerced into commercial sex and forced labor less than two miles from the College Park campus. We saw a need for services for trafficking survivors in Prince George’s and Montgomery counties, and we’re fortunate that the University of Maryland has stepped in to help fill this enormous need through the SAFE Center.”

— Alex Likowski and Chris Zang