The University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) and University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) today announced the opening of the University of Maryland SAFE (Support, Advocacy, Freedom and Empowerment) Center for Human Trafficking Survivors in College Park, Md. Steptoe partner and former Deputy US Trade Representative Susan Esserman, who leads the firm’s pro bono program on behalf of trafficking victims and has represented numerous survivors in Prince George’s County, Maryland, is the founder and director of the SAFE Center.

Located near the College Park campus, the SAFE Center will draw on the combined resources and the wide range of disciplines of both UMCP and UMB to address human trafficking. Through in-house services and collaborative partnerships, the center will provide direct services to US and foreign-born adult and child survivors of sex and labor trafficking, with a particular focus on survivors in Maryland’s Prince George’s and Montgomery counties. The center is designed to fill an unmet need in the region.

"Most people would be shocked to know the serious extent of the human trafficking problem in our Maryland communities," said Ms. 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."

The SAFE Center is an interdisciplinary service, research and advocacy initiative of UMCP and UMB through its formal collaborative program for innovation, University of Maryland: MPowering the State. Researchers from both universities will come together to expand the scholarship on human trafficking, and UMCP and UMB students will become the next generation of trafficking experts and survivor advocates.

At a formal ceremony today, officials from both universities, Prince George's and Montgomery counties, and the state of Maryland joined Ms. Esserman in launching the center. Along with the presidents of both UMCP and UMB, speakers included Sen. Ben Cardin, Rep. Chris Van Hollen, Maryland State Treasurer Nancy Kopp, and State's Attorney for Prince George's County, Angela Alsobrooks.

"These young people have survived betrayal and violence and desperately need this safe harbor to rebuild their lives," said University of Maryland President Wallace D. Loh. "The services they receive through this strategic partnership will truly empower their recovery."
"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," said University of Maryland, Baltimore President Jay A. Perman, MD. "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."

In addition to providing survivor-centered and trauma-informed services that empower trafficking survivors to heal and reclaim their lives, the SAFE Center will also help to prevent trafficking and better serve survivors through research and policy advocacy. The center will collaborate with the Prince George’s County, Montgomery County, and Maryland human trafficking taskforces—as well as local service providers, shelters, law enforcement, federal, state, and local agencies, and survivors themselves—to share best practices and make services more accessible. SAFE Center programs include:

- **Direct Services:** Through in-house services and collaboration with partners, the SAFE Center will provide intensive case management, legal services, counselling services, basic primary medical care and economic empowerment programs.
- **Research:** The center will collaborate with community organizations and human trafficking task forces to identify critical research gaps. It will work with interdisciplinary university departments to address those gaps and contribute to the body of knowledge in the human trafficking field.
- **Advocacy:** As an outgrowth of research and direct service provision, the SAFE Center will develop and support policy initiatives in collaboration with stakeholders.

At Steptoe, Ms. Esserman leads the firm's International Trade and Investment practice. She provides legal and strategic advice to clients on expanding access to global markets and represents clients in international trade litigation and dispute resolution matters. She is also very involved in firm management, and co-founded Steptoe’s Women’s Forum. Ms. Esserman has been active on a number of nonprofit boards supporting women, international development, and the arts. In 2015, *The National Law Journal* named Ms. Esserman to its list of “Outstanding Women Lawyers.”

For more information on the University of Maryland SAFE Center, visit [www.umdsafecenter.org](http://www.umdsafecenter.org).

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