

December 2, 2024

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave.,
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Support of Bill 25-24 – Contracts and Procurement – Prohibitions Against Human Trafficking – Enforcement

Dear President Friedson and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

On behalf of the University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors, we strongly support the passage of Bill 25-24 Contracts and Procurement - Prohibitions Against Human Trafficking – Enforcement introduced by Councilmember Dawn Luedtke and co-sponsored by Council President Friedson, Council Vice President Stewart, and Councilmembers Sidney Katz, Evan Glass, Will Jawando, Gabe Albornoz and Laurie-Anne Sayles. The passage of this legislation would make Montgomery County a leader among local governments in the fight against human trafficking, and we commend the approach taken in this legislation.

The University of Maryland Support, Advocacy, Freedom, and Empowerment (SAFE) Center for Human Trafficking Survivors is a unique university-based comprehensive services, research, and advocacy center for human trafficking survivors. Our mission is to provide survivor-centered and trauma-informed services that empower sex and labor trafficking survivors to heal and reclaim their lives, and to prevent trafficking and better serve survivors through research and policy advocacy. The SAFE Center provides bilingual (Spanish/English) legal, social, mental health, and economic empowerment services to sex and labor trafficking survivors. In eight years of operation, we have served over 450 human trafficking survivors and their family members – the majority of which live in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties. Nearly 60% of our current clients’ cases involve labor trafficking.


There are far too few effective mechanisms to deter human trafficking, and as the last two decades in the fight against human trafficking demonstrate, we cannot rely on the relatively small number of prosecutions and civil litigation alone to deter trafficking. Bill 25-24 would be an important mechanism to deter human trafficking as well as to protect vulnerable workers against exploitation. In particular, it will heighten awareness of the potential for labor trafficking and exploitation, particularly in sectors, such as construction, that have significant contracts with local governments. Moreover, taxpayer funds should not be paid to contractors engaged in or benefiting from trafficking and the exploitation of workers. With the passage of Bill 25-24, County contractors and subcontractors found to have been involved in sex and labor trafficking would face meaningful penalties, ensuring that those who do business with the county would be held to the highest standards.

As councilmember Luedtke notes, this bill mirrors recently approved Prince George’s County law. In July of this year, the Prince George’s County Council unanimously passed legislation, based on existing federal anti-trafficking procurement regulations, prohibiting County contractors and subcontractors from engaging in labor and sex trafficking and providing the

County with meaningful enforcement mechanisms, making it the first local jurisdiction in the country to pass such a measure. The SAFE Center, with critical pro bono support and procurement expertise provided by Steptoe LLP, worked with the Prince George's Human Trafficking Task Force Chair, Prince George's County Government and County Executive Angela Alsobrooks to develop and adapt the federal procurement model to Prince George's County. Montgomery County's passage of Bill 25-24 would significantly enhance efforts within the region to ensure the protection of workers.

For these reasons, the University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors supports the passage of Bill 25-24 Contracts and Procurement - Prohibitions Against Human Trafficking – Enforcement.

Sincerely,



Susan Esserman
Founder and CEO
University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors