



SAFE HOUSE
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**Remarks by Kristi Wells, Safe House Project CEO, for the Launch of the Frederick County Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking
November 21, 2024**

“Good morning. My name is Kristi Wells, and I have the honor of being the CEO and co-founder of Safe House Project. It's an honor to be here today as we launch this Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Force for Frederick County. It's a powerful day for all of us who are committed to this mission.

I'm also joined today by my co-founder, Brittany Dunn. I could not run this organization every day without her, so thank you for your vision, leadership, and constant dedication. I also want to recognize the entire Safe House Project team. They work around the clock to truly support survivors.

They work to bring our mission to life every day. Each member of our team is dedicated, compassionate, and driven by our mission. They want to see every single survivor they interact with reclaim their lives. None of what we do would be possible without their constant commitment and dedication.

Since we started Safe House Project, our goal has been clear. We run and bring hope, freedom, and healing to every single survivor that we encounter. Today, I'm proud to say that Safe House Project operates the largest survivor support network in the country, working with hundreds of partners to offer shelter resources and advocacy.

Through our efforts, we have trained more than 400,000 healthcare providers, law enforcement officers, and community members to identify the signs of human trafficking, which is important because that helps make early intervention possible in cases that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. As a result, in just the past few years, we've been able to support over 2,100 survivors as they begin their healing journey toward safety and empowerment.

This is a direct result of the hard work of our team, the trust of our partners, and the resilience of every single survivor that we serve at Safe House Project. We know that every survivor story is unique, and our approach has to reflect and understand that one of our core values is trauma-informed care, which we embed into everything that we do, from our programs to our partnerships. We're pioneering ways to use technology to enhance support for survivors and improve our reach. Our digital platforms allow us to create secure survivor-centered communication channels that connect survivors with essential services and resources across the country.

In addition to direct support, we invest in education and training for partners and communities.



SAFE HOUSE PROJECT

We equip them with the knowledge and tools to understand how to prevent trafficking and how to respond effectively. We know that our work is not only about serving survivors but also about preventing exploitation before it even happens. Safe, stable housing is crucial for any survivor's journey, which is why Safe House Project has expanded a network of vetted safe homes across the country.

Currently, we partner with over 354 trafficking-specific safe homes across the U.S., but 54 of those have been certified to evaluate them against best practices to ensure that they are serving survivors with excellence. Another 53 of those are targeted to be certified for 2025. Each one of these places provides survivors with not only a safe place to stay but also a place to heal and rebuild their lives.

This year alone, we placed over 1285 survivors in safe housing or helped them in their exit from their trafficking situation. We have offered them a firm foundation where they can begin a new chapter. Our approach has been proven effective for long-term survivor success and, ultimately, their independence in healing.

Our goal is to continue growing this network so that every survivor, no matter where they are, has access to safe and compassionate healing and a place to begin their healing journey. The heart of our work is a commitment to survivor-centered care. Every survivor's story is unique, and it's our job to honor that.

So from the moment a survivor calls, it is our job to make sure that we listen with respect, we empower their own choices, and then we help them on that journey to healing. Our focus is survivor autonomy and dignity, which is why we work so closely with partners across the country. We believe that that coordinated approach brings together law enforcement and health care providers and community organizations. And when we create that web of support for survivors and we give them the resources that they need to begin healing, incredible things happen. So I'm so grateful for the partnerships that were mentioned here today, the Frederick County Sheriff's, Sheriff's Office, the Frederick County State's Attorney's Office, the Frederick Frederick City Police Department, Operation Light Shine, and our federal partners.

Together, we are building that support system that leaves no survivor behind. One of the best things that makes this specific task force really unique and different from the others around the country are the innovative partnerships. We have built really unique partnerships with the hospitality industry throughout this task force that are going to help us ensure that survivors right as they exit get safe and stable and anonymous lodging as we help figure out where their next steps are on their path to healing.

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Department of Justice, especially the Office for Victims of Crime for believing in this approach and for giving us a chance to prove here in



SAFE HOUSE
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Frederick County that we can get this done. Their support of over \$600, 000 for a safe house project over the next three years allows us to expand our reach and deepen our impact and continue to develop in communities to provide innovative approaches for survivor support.

I am filled with hope when I see the commitment from the state's attorney's office and Homeland Security and our local and federal partners. You have to understand this is really unique and it's not something that happens everywhere across the country. So to see everybody coming together with a unified front against trafficking means that we have a really great opportunity to see tremendous collaboration, but more than that, tremendous impact.

As we move forward, I encourage everyone to stay focused on this mission. We know that trafficking is a devastating crime. We know it's here in this community, but we also know it's one that we can fight. It's one that we can win. And so this task force is more than just innovation. It's a beacon of hope for survivors to call and a call to action for this community to model what we know can be achieved in other parts of the country.

Safe House Project, alongside our incredible team and dedicated partners, are ready to contribute everything that we have to this task force. We're inspired by the resilience of the survivors that we serve every day and we are driven by the belief that every person deserves hope, freedom, and a future. So I look forward to seeing the lives that are going to be transformed as all of us work together to provide them that brighter future.

In closing, thank you for your dedication and commitment to this cause. Safe House Project is truly honored to be part of this incredible team and honored to stand alongside each of you in this fight against trafficking."

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