What is human trafficking? Human trafficking is a serious crime and violation of human rights, involving force, coercion, or fraud to exploit a person into labor or sexual exploitation. A common misconception about human trafficking is that it does not happen in the United States. This is false, sex and labor trafficking happen throughout the United States in nearly every town and city. Recent social media campaigns have drawn attention to this issue, but misrepresent the reality of sex and labor trafficking in the United States.

This CLE will explore Federal and State Trafficking Law with Rebecca Silinski (L’15), Assistant United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, and Summer Carroll, PA Office of Attorney General, Organized Crime Unit. Richard Mullen, retired lieutenant with the Allegheny County Police, Karen Davidson, retired Special Agent of the FBI, and Denise Holtz, retired Special Agent of the FBI, will discuss investigating this heinous crime. Rebecca Mackenzie will share her experiences as a human trafficking survivor. Alexia Tomlinson, Senior Justice for Victims Fellow at the Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation at Villanova University’s Charles Widger School of Law, will cover the vital importance of trauma informed lawyering’s role in representing trafficking victims. The program will be moderated by Judy Hale, Esq. (L’14), MPA, Legal Advocacy Manager at the Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.

Presenter Biographies

Rebecca L. Silinski is an Assistant United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania. As a federal prosecutor, Ms. Silinski has prosecuted a variety of cases, including child exploitation and obscenity, large-scale drug-trafficking and organized crime as well as other violent crimes. In June of 2020, she was named the Human Trafficking Coordinator for the Western District of Pennsylvania. In this role, she is responsible for leading efforts to raise awareness, educate and train, and investigate and prosecute those who commit this heinous crime.

Prior to joining the US Attorney’s Office, Ms. Silinski worked in private practice focusing largely on federal white collar defense, False Claims Act/ qui tam matters, civil rights litigation, internal investigations and various estate matters.
Ms. Silinski earned her JD from the Duquesne University School of Law where she received the Katie Elisabeth Westbrook Award for Excellency in Trial Advocacy, the Shalom Moot Court Award, the Dr. John E. Marry, Jr. Award for Outstanding Writing, and was named a National Member of the Order of the Barristers.

Ms. Silinski received her Master’s Degree in Leadership and Organizational Performance from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University while serving as the Graduate Assistant Coach for the Vanderbilt Women’s Basketball program. Ms. Silinski received her Bachelors of Science in Communication Studies and Political Science, also from Vanderbilt University where she was a four-year letter winner from the Commodore’s women’s basketball program. During which time, she was a member of four NCAA tournament teams, with two Sweet Sixteen appearances, and a member of the 2009 SEC Championship team.

Summer Carroll is a 2007 graduate of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. While in law school, she realized she wanted to be a prosecutor, completing an externship at the Mecklenburg County District Attorney’s Office in Charlotte, NC. Upon graduation, she worked as an Assistant District Attorney in Allegheny County ultimately specializing in violent crimes committed with a firearm. In 2016, she joined the PA Office of Attorney General in the Medicaid Fraud Unit where she developed several cases against doctors for overprescribing opioids. She then moved to her current position in the Organized Crime Unit where she maintains a diverse case load including: corrupt organizations, human trafficking, burglary rings, money laundering and financial crimes, and public corruption.

Richard Mullen retired as a lieutenant with the Allegheny County Police in 2018 and is currently employed with the Washington County District Attorney’s Office and A Child’s Place Child Advocacy Center. Mr. Mullen spent most of his career assigned to the Allegheny County Police General Investigation Unit. He served as both a detective and a supervisor in the Allegheny County Police Sex Assault and Child Abuse Unit for over 15 years. He continues to train veteran police officers in child abuse investigation techniques.

Mr. Mullen is an adjunct professor at California University of Pennsylvania and Point Park University, teaching in the criminal justice departments of both universities. He is a certified MPOETC instructor, teaching at the Allegheny County Police Academy.

Mr. Mullen holds a bachelor’s degree from Geneva College in Human Resources Management and a master’s degree from Point Park University in the Administration of Criminal Justice.

Mr. Mullen is a member of the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Medical/Legal Advisory Board on Child Abuse and was recognized as one of the top fifty “Irish-America Law & Order Leaders of 2014” by the Irish Echo newspaper in New York City.

Karen Davidson, retired Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and, former Allegheny County Transit Police Sergeant, with 27 years of law enforcement experience. During her FBI career, she was assigned to work mostly Crimes of Violence in the Greater Pittsburgh and New York City Metropolitan areas. Her current position at A Child’s Place, allows her the opportunity to educate the general public about Human Trafficking, and share experiences learned, while working similar type cases. Karen has a BA in Criminal Justice and an MA in Public Administration.

Denise Holtz is a retired Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, specializing in Crimes Against Children, Violent Crime and Human Trafficking, with over 20 years of law enforcement experience. During her FBI career, Denise provided hundreds of hours of training to Law Enforcement and other professional and community organizations. She is a certified Human Trafficking Instructor, and has extensive experience as a liaison with law enforcement and relationships with victims and victim’s advocacy. Her current position at A Child’s Place, allows her to continue to educate law enforcement and the general public about Human Trafficking. In these recent trainings Denise shares the hands-on experience gained while working these cases, which includes detailed victimology. Denise holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Northern Kentucky University.

Rebecca Mackenzie ("Becky") spent her teen years, homeless and then trafficked, on the streets of Buffalo, NY. After years recovering her life, she now uses those experiences to assist other kids in similar situations. As an EMT she does
not work with an ambulance service but rather, as a volunteer clinician with Operation Safety Net, she provides on-street medical care and support to the homeless and exploited of Pittsburgh. She also occasionally assists law enforcement and social service agencies in the identification and rescue of kids being trafficked and exploited. She is a PhD candidate / pre-med student at the University of Pittsburgh developing applications of machine-learning in medicine and forensics. She recently completed an internship at Marinus Analytics, designers of Traffic Jam. She is married and has a daughter and granddaughter.

Alexia Tomlinson is the Senior Justice for Victims Fellow at the Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation at Villanova University’s Charles Widger School of Law. In this position, Ms. Tomlinson provides direct legal services to victims and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation primarily through post-conviction relief. She also engages in anti-trafficking education and advocacy efforts across the Commonwealth. Prior to beginning her fellowship, Ms. Tomlinson clerked for the Honorable Jeffery D. Wright in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, working on both civil and criminal matters. In this position, she also served as a member of the Lancaster County Veterans Treatment Court. Ms. Tomlinson graduated from Dickinson School of Law in 2018. During her time as a law student, she focused on international public interest law working for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, as well as St. Andrew’s Refugee Service in Cairo. She attended Franklin & Marshall College as an undergraduate.

Judy Hale is dedicated to improving the lives of women and children and to combating trafficking in persons. For over two decades, she has been working to improve gender equity and promote safety for vulnerable people. She has focused on addressing these issues through partnerships and cooperation between government and civil society, and building professional capacities by teaching and training a variety of professionals and students on human trafficking and related matters. Ms. Hale served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Republic of Moldova. She returned to Moldova to work on social service system development, and then on national coordination and capacity building for anti-trafficking in persons work with the OSCE Mission to Moldova. She is a licensed attorney with a Juris Doctor, a Master of Public Administration, and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Women’s Studies. Ms. Hale currently works with the Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh as the Legal Advocacy Manager, and participates on their Refugee, Immigrant, and Limited English (RIL) team to improve the agency’s capacity to serve all victims. She teaches a Human Trafficking social sciences course at Chatham University, and serves on a variety of boards and commissions related to social justice, gender equity, and human rights.