Those found guilty of human trafficking will be classified as first degree felons carrying a 10-year prison sentence.

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COLUMBUS – When it comes to the growing crisis of human trafficking in Ohio, everyone is on the same page about one thing: those who are profiting from that business are “despicable human beings” who deserve to be tracked down and thrown into prison for good.

“I don’t know that I can think of a greater evil than the human slave trade,” said Governor John Kasich, who also went on to say, “We will win this battle. We’re going to lock you up forever and throw away the key. I don’t know when you are going to get out.”

And he probably will not waste a dollop of time trying to figure that out. Rather, the governor is focusing on nabbing and locking them up.

Kasich took the first step in that endeavor last week after he signed an executive order establishing a task force to combat human trafficking. He made those heartfelt remarks during the signing ceremony establishing the panel he hopes will help put a kibosh to a practice he decried as appalling.

Vowing to “break the backbone of this business,” Kasich said the mission of the task force is to “coordinate statewide efforts to identify and rescue victims of human trafficking,” focusing more resources on rescuing underage victims being exploited by pimps.

Seemingly, bipartisanship has an important role to play in this battle. Governor Kasich called on Democrat State Representative Theresa Fedor to join the effort. She gleefully agreed.

“Responding appropriately is the key to combating the human rights issue of our lifetime. I am hopeful that the task force can come together and coordinate resources to best combat this problem that has destroyed the lives of so many young girls and women. This will never be a quick fix, but today marks an enormous leap of progress for Ohio,” said Fedor.

The linchpin of the task force mission is to marshal the resources currently being committed to solving the problem by various state agencies, including the Departments of Health, Mental Health, Job and Family Services, Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, Youth Services, Education, Agriculture, and Public Safety. Also to be included in these efforts are the Office of Health Transformation and Board of Cosmetology.

More specifically, the task force, which currently has no funding, is to “investigate and prosecute these crimes, and to provide services and treatment necessary for victims to regain control of

their lives."

Fedor is excited that the state is finally doing something about this problem. After years of trying to get some traction on efforts to combat this crisis and running into discouraging potholes and roadblocks, Fedor is pleased that Ohio has decided to make a serious move to address a problem she said is wrecking the lives of young people.

For years, she said she unsuccessfully tried to get her colleagues to see the imperative of aggressively fighting human trafficking, focusing on the young victims being forced into sexual bondage by self-serving pimps in a crisis that is out of control.

"When a minor is being sexually exploited, that minor is often arrested on prostitution charges and is sent to jail. Quite simply, this does not solve the problem. If the arrested minor is instead provided with needed services to recover, that minor will be able to break the cycle of abuse and become a contributing member of society. Without some form of intervention, 77 percent of sexually exploited youth simply continue to be prostitutes in adulthood," said Fedor.

But for Fedor, this is only a start. She plans to beef up the governor's laudable effort by introducing companion legislation called the Sub. House Bill 262 or the Safe Harbor Act. The bill will not only empower law enforcement to fiercely pursue and arrest the pimps responsible for trapping these girls into prostitution, but also focus on treating the victims and giving them their lives back.

Fedor's bill will come with sharp teeth.

Those found guilty of human trafficking will be classified as first degree felons carrying a 10-year prison sentence. Similarly, those who engage in the cover up of these crimes or involved in obstruction of justice in the course of investigation related to these crimes will get hit with first or second degree felony.

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