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**By IKE MGBATOGU**
Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – In March, Governor John Kasich set out to “break the backbone” of the business of human-trafficking of young girls.

And in June, he took a major action to do just that after he signed an executive order establishing a task force to combat a practice he called “evil” by “despicable human beings.” That panel recently submitted a potpourri of recommendations to him containing 26 ideas for fighting this scourge.

One good idea that will help immensely came to fruition last week at Toledo Area Ministries

(TAM) offices where Kasich signed House Bill 262 into law to protect Ohio's children and go after the pimps enslaving them as prostitutes.

"We are throwing the books at the abusers, not just the traffickers, but those who profit from the trafficking, and those who are somehow in the chain of trafficking," said Kasich, who went on to praise the dovetailing spirit of all involved in the effort. "You can't get anything done without cooperation."

Bi-partisan evidence of that cooperation was abundantly visible by those who flanked the governor during the signing ceremony including Sen. Mark Wagoner, Sen. Capri Cafaro, Rep. Mike Ashford, human trafficking survivor Marlene Carson, Rev. Stephen Anthony of TAM from Akron and State Rep. Teresa Fedor of Toledo who is pleased as the primary sponsor of the bill.

"What you see here today is the right thing," said Fedor, of the law. "For seven years, I felt as though I was hearing the Lord, hearing the cries every night of the victims [of human trafficking,] and now we are going to have fewer and fewer and fewer of our children crying at night."

She continued, "The health and wellbeing of our children cannot be any more important than anything we do in our lives. We need to provide quality life for our children. It is our duty and responsibility" to "root this problem out."

Not only will HB 262 protect children from this "evil," it will also unleash severe penalty for the selfish and rapacious pimps who prey on these young girls for their own financial gain. Those guilty of human-tracking will be slapped with a mandatory prison term of 10 to 15 years.

"I don't know that I can think of a greater evil than the human slave trade," said 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."

Kasich's hope is for this law to go a long way in putting a kibosh to a practice he decried as appalling. The mission of the task force he created is to "coordinate statewide efforts to identify and rescue victims of human trafficking," focusing more resources on rescuing underage victims

being exploited by these parasitic pimps.

Fedor applauded the task force, hailing it as an appropriate tool for combating the human rights issue of our lifetime. She too decried human trafficking as evil wrecking “the lives of so many young girls and women.”

The role of the task force, now vastly reinforced by this law, “is to “investigate and prosecute these crimes, and to provide services and treatment necessary for victims to regain control of their lives.”

Fedor is particularly excited that the state has finally addressed this problem after years of toiling to get some traction on it and running into discouraging roadblocks.

She spoke about the core importance of this law.

“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,” argued Fedor.

With this law, Fedor said that there will be intervention, services and treatment for these young victims on their way to reclaiming their lives back. She added that it will empower law enforcement to fiercely pursue and arrest the pimps responsible for trapping these girls into prostitution.

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