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# Ohio one of worst states for human trafficking

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Written by Jami Kinton News Journal

**CARDINGTON** — Ohio is one of the top five worst states in America for human trafficking.

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It's known as the "oldest oppression to women in the world," yet State Representative Teresa Fedor said the fight for more education, stricter laws and harsher punishments is as tough as ever.

On Monday, Fedor was the keynote speaker at a Human Trafficking Awareness Program in Morrow County.

Human trafficking is the trade in human beings, most commonly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labor or for the extraction of organs or tissues, including surrogacy and ova removal.

"We have modern slavery — and it's called human trafficking," Fedor said. "If these victims can't get away, then they're enslaved. And those responsible are very crafty. They make threats, they threaten with pictures, they tell these victims that no one cares about them."

Fedor said the average age of the victims involved in human trafficking is 13.

"You might think that these things are only taking place in the bigger cities like Cleveland and Columbus, but did you know that there have been reported cases in Marion and Mansfield?" she said. "This is happening everywhere."

And forget the stereotypes.

"This is not just in the bad areas," Fedor said. "This is going on in

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suburban neighborhoods, in very nice homes. And it's not just 'bad women.' It could happen to anyone here. And it's not just happening to females. It's despicable."

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Earlier Monday, Fedor introduced the End Demand Act, which focuses on reducing demand, increasing the penalties for users and rescuing victims.

"We need to be educating our children," she said. "If something doesn't feel right, we need to let them know it's OK to 'Yell and tell.' Unlike drugs, the demand is so high for human trafficking that these pimps will share girls. One survivor told me that she watched another girl be traded for a car."

Fedor said 200,000 American kids are at risk for trafficking into the sex industry.

There are nearly 3,000 youth at risk in Ohio.

Fedor said the reason the numbers are so high in Ohio is because of a large immigrant population, and there are more truck stops and colleges and universities in Ohio than any other state.

"Children don't choose to do this," she said. "They are kidnapped, coerced, forced and manipulated."

There is also major health-related issues involved.

Fedor said victims suffer from more heart problems, more asthma, depression, bipolar disorders, HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and more.

Possible victim identifiers include hotel room keys, numerous school absences, multiple cellphones, fake IDs and much older, abusive and controlling "boyfriends."

Fedor said the community can help by supporting trafficking legislation, report instances and join local coalitions.

Morrow County Sheriff Steven Brennemen said one of the best things parents can do is be involved in their children's lives.

"We just need to be parents," he said. "We need to know where are kids are, what they're doing, where they're going."

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