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### **Statement of Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas in Support of New Sex Trafficking Bill by Senators Diane Feinstein and Rob Portman**

I would like to commend Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio) for authoring the Combat Human Trafficking Act, which was introduced yesterday in the United States Senate. The bill seeks to penalize adults who buy sex from trafficking victims and strengthen victim's rights. While many federal, state and local efforts have focused mainly on prosecuting the traffickers, it is time we start looking at the buyers who fuel this crime. After all, sex trafficking is a demand-driven industry.

The Combat Human Trafficking Act would ensure that federal law enforcement officials are properly trained to investigate and then prosecute these buyers. It also views those who are being trafficked for what they are: exploited women and children-not criminals.

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that up to 83 percent of sex trafficking victims are American citizens, and the average victim is first trafficked between ages 12 and 14. There are few topics more disturbing than the buying and selling of children for sex. Unfortunately, our society is still misinformed about this issue. Many still refer to it as prostitution. But, this is modern day slavery and a multi-billion dollar industry driven by unscrupulous adults.

We must put an end to this notion that people—mostly women, girls and boys—are commodities to be bought and sold. This bill will help protect victims while punishing the adults who profit and derive enjoyment from this despicable trade.

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