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Thank you to Chairwoman Handley, Chairwoman Sayers, and the members of the Public Health Committee for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Gina Gallivan. I am 27 years old and a resident of Glastonbury, CT.

I am here today to voice my support of Senate Bill 673. My life was saved by a bone marrow transplant, and I want as many people as possible to be able to share a similar story. I believe that allowing volunteers to join the bone marrow registry free of cost will promote more of these lifesaving procedures. The more people we encourage to join the registry, the greater the chance that patients will be able to find donor matches and receive bone marrow transplants.

Less than two years ago, I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. At the age of 25, I had been married for less than one year and was employed in my current job as an English teacher at Wethersfield High School. I was coaching the high school girls' varsity tennis team and taking classes towards my Master's Degree at Central Connecticut State University. I had always been a healthy, energetic and active member of my community, and felt confident that my future looked promising and fulfilling.

My diagnosis of leukemia could not have come as more of a shock to my family or me. As an inpatient at Brigham and Women's Hospital, I underwent one month of intensive chemotherapy and radiation that led to remission. Subsequently I returned to Dana Farber Cancer Institute as an outpatient receiving weekly chemotherapy and radiation to try to keep the cancer in remission. The doctors told me that the most promising way to prevent recurrence of the cancer would be to receive a bone marrow transplant.

Although my family and I were disappointed when my only sibling was not a match for me, we all placed our hope in the possibility that I might find a donor match through the National Bone Marrow Registry. As other written and spoken testimonies today will confirm, the process of waiting and searching for a match is a costly and emotionally draining one.

When your body is being reduced to its weakest state through chemotherapy and radiation in order to kill a deadly disease that threatens to recur at any time, when you are riddled with anxiety, fear and depression at the overwhelming thoughts and emotions such an experience brings forth, and when your only hope is placed in the chance that a bone marrow donor match will be found, you understand immediately the value of having as many people as possible join the bone marrow registry.

I had the fortune to find a donor match, a 21-year old male. Although I do not know his name or where he lives, I do know that I am alive today because he volunteered to join the bone marrow registry.

To think that the cancer with which I was afflicted was so threatening and pervasive that my life was in peril is frightening. But to know that a bone marrow transplant allowed my weakened body to recover and heal is extraordinary. Less than two years ago, I would not have been able to stand here before you testifying. I would have been too exhausted and weak to walk up my stairs, lift a laundry basket, or make myself a meal. I was completely dependent on my husband, family and friends to get through each day. Today, just a little over a year later, I am celebrating my health with my family and friends. I am guiding and challenging my students and players in the classroom and on the tennis court, laughing with them, motivating them and congratulating them on their successes. I am able to once again do all of the things I looked forward to as a newly married woman. Telling you about the very low point I was at only two years ago and my return to health and daily activity is the strongest testament I can offer on the amazing nature of this procedure and its profound impact on saving patients' lives.

Over the course of the last three years, I have shared my fears with other patients waiting for a match, grieved with those family members who lost loved ones because matches were never found and encouraged those who are still waiting and hoping for a match to have faith and be strong. When I return to Dana Farber I speak to patients in a situation similar to mine, many of whom are young and were active like I was. They have plans to finish college and start families, and they are bright and talented people who have so much to contribute to their communities. I speak to others who are in the midst of raising and providing for their families, and still others who were planning on enjoying their retirement. I visit two young women, both of whom are of college age, one of whom is preparing to receive a bone marrow transplant and the other of whom is waiting for a donor match. I listen to the passion with which they share their plans and dreams, and I listen to their fear and sorrow as they share their reactions to how cancer has brought their promising futures to a halt.

The key to making my success story one of many is to find donors for patients suffering from blood cancers and disorders. To hear of people of all ages not surviving because they could not find a match is such a tragedy. It is unbearable to know that Michael Wrobel, whose family you will hear from today, faced the cruel injustice of having his life cut short at the young age of 11 because he could not find a match. I feel that it is my duty as a survivor, in the memory of those like Michael, to provide hope to my friends at Dana Farber who are waiting for donor matches by doing everything I can to increase the chances of matches being found. The most immediate way to do this is to make joining the registry as easy as possible for those who are interested. I believe that this bill will help other patients' lives be saved because covering the cost of registering to be a bone marrow donor will make people more apt to become donors and thus increase the number of potential donor matches for patients.

One of the most profound experiences after my bone marrow transplant was when I was sitting in the phlebotomy lab for my routine blood tests and observing a donor who was also having her blood tested as a preliminary step in the donor process. To see one person so willing to give of herself to save a life of another person she will never meet really was to witness a miracle in the making. To think that some Connecticut residents turn away from the opportunity to give others life because of the considerable cost of registering is a shame.

I have recently been allowed to write an anonymous letter of thanks to my bone marrow donor, and I hope to one day be able to meet and thank him in person. I hope that through your support of bill 673, I will be able to report to him the good news that will lead to more donors saving lives. Please support this bill so we can help to make bone marrow transplants occur as often as they are needed to save lives.