

February 21, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to offer the following testimony in support of SB 673, an act concerning health insurance coverage for bone marrow testing sponsored by the honorable Senator Handley.

My reasons for standing before you are two-fold. I am here as a representative of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of which I am an employee, as well as a Connecticut citizen with a personal connection to the important statute this bill represents.

As a representative of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society I speak on behalf of the thousands of patients whose most viable treatment for their disease is a bone marrow transplant. Between 1970 – when the transplant registry began tracking data – and today, the frequency of bone marrow transplantation for the treatment of blood cancers has increased from hundreds to thousands of patients each year. Donor programs have been established to identify unrelated donors whose tissue type matches that of a patient. According to the National Marrow Donor Program 70% of patients do not have a matched donor in their family, which is why this legislation is so important. Without it, individuals may shy away from possible donation – a donation that could give someone a second chance at life.

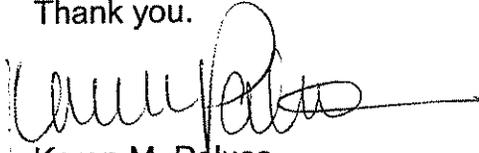
In addition, bone marrow donation is only allowed up to the age of 60 and each year people are removed from the registry as they reach age 61. The registry also loses potential donors due to changes in health status and donor relocation. Thus, insurance coverage of costs related to donation may encourage quality donors to give, which would help to maintain the number of donors in the registry.

All of that information is educational and persuasive on its own but it does not illustrate the human side to bone marrow donation – the other, more important reason I am providing this testimony. My boyfriend, Keith Berger, received a second chance at life on Christmas Eve 2003. After a lengthy illness and over a year of chemotherapy for Hodgkin's lymphoma with little result, it was decided that he would have a bone marrow transplant. This decision was made under the intense pressure of severe illness. It was a last resort. However Keith felt that even if he had only a 1% chance that he would take it – a chance is a chance no matter how you package it. Like many individuals his donor was unrelated. He was a 21 year old kid in fact. A kid Keith said he would love to meet when this process was all over to thank him for making the most selfless choice of all – donation. Without this individual's donation Keith would never have had a chance to fight. And Keith was a fighter. An active cyclist he took part in a 100 mile bicycle ride with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training program while he was sick.

Keith fought right up until the end. He passed away on April 9, 2004 – Good Friday. He was 32 years old.

Please, I implore you to pass SB 673 so that other cancer patients are able to find suitable donors. Bone marrow transplantation is a painful, time consuming process but it may be another's only chance at survival. Passage of this bill can make it easier to donate thus allowing patients the chance to fight for their lives.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen M. Paluso', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen M. Paluso
Campaign Coordinator