

**Paul Sullivan Testimony: Public Health Committee Public Hearing –
SB 827 Blood Donations by Minors 02/10/09**

I'm Paul Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer of the American Red Cross Connecticut Blood Services Region.

The American Red Cross supplies all 30 acute care hospitals in the state with life sustaining and lifesaving blood products. The American Red Cross needs to collect approximately 650 units of blood a day to meet hospital needs. In Connecticut hospitals, every day, patients need blood. Although blood donations are growing, they are not keeping pace with demand. Currently, in Connecticut, the minimum age to donate blood is 17.

The American Red Cross strongly supports the ability of 16-year-olds to donate blood with parental consent. Effective March 9, 2007, the Board of Governors of the American Red Cross approved 16-year-olds as an eligible blood donor group, consistent with applicable state law. Today, twenty-eight states, more than half the states in the nation, now allow 16-year olds to donate blood with parental consent. Several other states have legislation pending.

The American Red Cross encourages you to enact Connecticut SB-827 to include 16-year olds to donate because it will increase the number of eligible donors and enhance our ability to meet the need of lifesaving blood for hospitals and patients. Moreover, we believe by enabling 16-year olds to donate blood, they will have a greater opportunity to understand this important civic responsibility, before leaving high school.

This year in Connecticut, the American Red Cross will distribute over 165,000 units of red cells. Of this, approximately 155,000 units are collected from donors in Connecticut. We are dependent on other states to make up the shortfall of approximately 10,000 red cells by importing blood from other regions in excess of their need. We are able to do this thanks to the network of American Red Cross regions around the country. Not only does this dependency on importing blood from other parts of the country leave us at risk in the event of an emergency, it also represents a missed opportunity for that blood to be collected by people employed in the state of Connecticut. The American Red Cross, Connecticut Blood Services, employs 405 staff members.

By including 16-year olds in Connecticut's blood donor population, you will help the State of Connecticut move towards self-sufficiency by helping to increase blood collections and decreasing the need to import blood from out of state.

Seventeen and eighteen year old high school donors are already a very important donor group in Connecticut representing approximately 17,000 units collected each year. Student recruiting teams sponsor blood drives in high schools around Connecticut. This effort would be strengthened with the inclusion of 16-year olds, many of whom are already involved with blood drives in their schools.

Exposure to voluntary blood donation in high school is an important opportunity for the Red Cross to educate potential donors on the benefits of a lifetime of committed service to the community through blood donation. Allowing 16-year olds to donate increases the potential for these teens to develop a lifelong habit of donating blood and provides eligible students an opportunity to participate in this important civic duty. Blood products have a limited shelf life and must constantly be replenished.

We feel great responsibility to educate all our donors in the blood donation process. We want everyone to feel good about being a blood donor. We actively reach out to parents and students alike to answer questions about what to expect and how to prepare for successful blood donation. Our procedures for 16-year olds to donate will include requiring parental consent.

I remember when I was first eligible to donate blood as a 17-year old in high school in Connecticut and the pride I took at helping others in need when I donated blood for the first time. Today, I donate blood regularly. I visit our blood drives all over the state and it is always clear that blood donors feel very good about themselves when they donate blood. They know they are contributing to the blood supply and helping to save lives by giving the "gift of life." We support giving sixteen year olds the opportunity to have that same pride and the opportunity to give back by contributing to the health and well being of our community.

Giving sixteen year olds this opportunity will have a positive impact on the American Red Cross ability to collect blood for hospitals and patients in Connecticut. Thank you for your consideration and I hope you will enact this important legislation as it will help us to continue to fulfill our mission to maintain a sufficient blood supply.