

AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Testimony before the Public Health Committee

Wednesday, March 7th, 2012

10:00 am in Room 1D of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst with the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission is an advocate for the African-American community. We accomplish our mission primarily through research, policy analysis and information sharing. We are here today to testify in support of

House Bill (HB) 5333 – *An act concerning organ and tissue donation awareness.*

In reference to **HB 5333** we recognize that there is a need to educate the public and increase awareness about organ donation. Finding a suitable organ donor is a complicated problem for anyone no matter your race, income or class. However the lack of available donors is extremely challenging for many in the African-American community. Nationally minorities make up about 20 percent of the population, but slightly more than 50 percent of the waiting list for organ transplants.¹ Here in Connecticut as of February 24th of this year 34 percent of those on the waiting list for donors are African-American, a disproportionate number, considering the size of the African-American population. Overall of the 1,236 waiting for donors at least a 100 have been waiting for 5 or more years.² These numbers are unacceptable. **HB 5333** seeks to increase the number of

¹ Donate Life, *The Facts about Organ and Tissue Donation*

² Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, *Organs by Ethnicity and Waiting Lists*

organ donors through an advisory Council. In addition it implements a measure to increase donor funding opportunities.

The first is to create a hybrid advisory panel of private and public sector parties to explore the best practice of other state's effectiveness in increasing the number of registered donors. An increase of registered donors leads to more organ and tissue donors which leads to more transplants - saving the lives of the more than 1,240 Connecticut residents currently waiting for a life saving organ transplant.

The second part of this legislation piece is to create a voluntary check off box to donate \$2 to the Organ and Tissue Awareness Fund when renewing a car registration (or license renewal - it is unclear which path will be taken depending on ease of system adaptation). The idea would be two fold that, first, the repeated exposure to the topic would bring awareness to the life-giving decision we all can make. The second opportunity this check off box (for a voluntary \$2) would create is an opportunity for the public to charitably support an organization that affects hundreds of Connecticut residents (and tens of thousands of Americans) annually. This fund would be used to promote organ and tissue donation to ultimately increase the number of registered donors. We support these efforts fully.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.