

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF ALEXANDER "JAY" SHAK

MARCH 7, 2012

IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL NUMBER 5333
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

AN ACT CONCERNING ORGAN & TISSUE DONATION

Representative Ritter, Senator Gerratana, members of the Public Health Committee – thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of House Bill #5333.

My name is Jay Shak and I am respectfully encouraging the Committee to promptly consider and to vote favorably on House Bill #5333 – Legislation that will enhance our collective efforts to raise awareness among the citizens of Connecticut of the vital importance of organ and tissue donation.

Over 30 years ago, my oldest son Luke was born and almost immediately went into critical heart failure. Young and frightened parents, we were bluntly told that Luke would soon expire as a consequence of being born with a serious case of congenital heart disease. In my son's instance, Luke was afflicted with over 30 holes in the septum of his heart.

Refusing to surrender without a fight, Luke was airlifted to Boston Children's Hospital – where we were again offered two stark and difficult choices. We could allow my son to quietly pass away or we could navigate him through an untested series of surgical procedures that offered us little hope of recovery.

We chose the surgery and thanks to his extraordinary team of doctors and clinicians, Luke survived over 7 open-heart operations before reaching his first birthday. Unfortunately, in order completely close the holes in his heart - the surgeons had no choice but to seriously damage his left ventricle in the process. As a result, we were told that ultimately his heart would fail as he grew older and a transplant would be the only recourse available.

That prediction came true 16 years later when Luke's heart did fail and he was airlifted to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center for what would be the first of two successful and life-saving heart transplants.

We never got to know Luke's donor families and we mourn the fact that we never had the opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation for what is in my opinion one of the most significant acts of generosity any human being can bestow upon another.

And I know from our own experience, the drip-by-drip heartache one feels as you wait day after day, month and month, watching your child slowly die in front of your very eyes while praying daily to hear those splendid words "someone has donated your son a heart".

And my son and my family have been blessed to hear those magnificent words on two unforgettable occasions. And if by passing HB 5333, one more child, or one more adult, will get to hear those glorious words "we found your loved one a new heart" – then you have done the state of Connecticut and its most vulnerable citizens an enormous public service.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

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