

**Written Testimony of
- Kari A. Mull -**

March 7, 2012

**Testimony in support of HB 5333,
An Act Concerning Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness
Public Health Committee**

Representative Ritter, Senator Gerratana, and members of the Public Health Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony in strong support of House Bill # 5333, An Act Concerning Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness.

My name is Kari Mull. I am the Director of Donate Life Connecticut. More importantly, I am the sister of Amanda Paro. Amanda passed away three months short of graduating as a nurse from Colby Sawyer College in 2003. In our darkest hour of grief, my family seized the opportunity to fulfill my sister's final gift to the world, as she became a donor. She gave sight to a 68 year old grandmother and a 17 year old high school male. Twenty-three people received bone grafts from Amanda for surgeries including hip and knee replacements. One of her heart valves was transplanted into a 9 year old little girl. Countless others received skin grafts to help burn victims and vein transplants for by-pass surgeries. My mother, my living sister and I find great comfort knowing that Amanda's gift helped others also avoid the loss of their loved ones. Months after Amanda's passing, I began volunteering and sharing our experience as a donor family. When the opportunity presented itself, I changed career paths and began working for Donate Life Connecticut.

I feel great pride to work with an organization that honors the gifts given by people like my sister and that strives to save the lives of thousands still in need. Over 113,000 Americans presently are waiting for a life saving transplant. Generally there are two ways off the waiting list: receive an organ transplant or die waiting. It is unforgivable that every day in this country 18 Americans die waiting for their 'gift of life'.

Donate Life Connecticut's mission is to increase the number of registered organ and tissue donors in the state through outreach and education. We educate the youth of Connecticut through high school programs allowing them to make informed decisions when visiting the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and being asked if they would like to join the Donor Registry. We are thankful for our growing relationship with the CT DMV to improve donation education within branches and front line staff. They are part of this important education chain. We work with municipalities and workplaces to increase donor awareness to employees.

I see first hand how the opinions of our audiences change as they listen to our presentations that provide factual information and personal stories from our volunteers. For some who have never considered registering as donors, it seems unthinkable that they had not already done so. Others who were hesitant to register because of misconceptions they have heard or seen on

television seem to reconsider their decision. Education is THE KEY to increasing the number of registered donors in our state.

Presently, Connecticut has nearly 1.1 million adults registered as organ and tissue donors, approximately 40% of the adult population. Unfortunately, this falls short of the national average of 42% of adults registered. Connecticut is an above average state in many ways – but not in donor registration rates. Let's change that.

HB5333 creates the implementation of an inclusive council to explore best practices successfully executed in high performing states. With the creation of the voluntary check off box to donate to the Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Fund, resources would be available to implement such programs. We need Connecticut to pass this bill and join the majority of states (29) who have taken legislative action to increase registration rates and save lives of their citizens. Right now, we have 1,245 Connecticut residents with their families and communities waiting on your vote and support.

With great respect and gratitude,

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