

**Written Testimony of
Leslie Schlemmer**

March 7, 2012

**In Support of House Bill No. 5333
Public Health Committee**

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

Representative Ritter, Senator Gerratana, and members of the Public Health Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of House Bill # 5333.

My name is Leslie Schlemmer. I am an organ transplant recipient. I am writing in support of House Bill 5333. This important legislation will increase opportunities to educate the residents of Connecticut about the importance of organ and tissue donation.

Ten years ago this year, I received a live-saving liver transplant. At the age of 34 I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder that had severely cirrosed my liver. My liver, normally about the size and shape of a football, was so scarred it was like a beat up baseball. The blood that normally would flow through a healthy liver could not get through my liver. This caused various symptoms of liver failure, from exhaustion to bleeding internally. My husband and two boys ages 9 and 11 at the time didn't know what to expect each day. I was listed for transplant after one severe internal bleed that left me very close to death, hospitalized, with no hope. You see, you need a liver to live, and mine simply would never get better.

Hope arrived through the generosity of a stranger, someone who had made the choice to give the gift of life to others. I am alive today because of this amazing gift! Prior to transplant it was hard for me just to get out of bed, every day was a struggle.

My husband and I will celebrate our 27th wedding anniversary this year and our boys have now matured to young men of 21 and 23 years. I work full time in a position I love and take pride in actively volunteering as a church Deacon, scholarship chairperson, community event planner, children's literacy advocate, and a musician. I also share my story as a volunteer with Donate Life Connecticut. Through sharing my story and educating the public about organ and tissue donation this organization has given me the opportunity to offer hope to others.

I support this legislation as it creates an opportunity for Connecticut to increase the number of donors statewide. Lives are at stake with 19 Americans dying daily simply because an organ did not come in time. The situation is dire; Connecticut is below the nationally average of adults committed to organ and tissue donation. By increasing education, information, exposure and outreach we can increase the number of registered donors in Connecticut. The

ultimate goal is to save more lives because more people say yes to donation! Creating the proposed collaborative advisory panel will allow us to work as a team in developing strategies to accomplish this goal.

Wow, to know that you will have a positive impact and give hope to the more than 1,200 Connecticut residents waiting for this amazing “gift of life” is inspiring. Thank you for having the foresight to introduce this life-saving legislation.

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