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STATE SENATOR · 14TH SENATE DISTRICT

Senate Bill 868: Electing to be an organ donor when filing income taxes
Senate Committee on Health
Testimony of Senator Joan Ballweg
February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chair Cabral-Guevara and members of the committee. Thank you for hearing this important piece of legislation.

Wisconsin currently allows individuals to register as an organ donor on their state issued driver's license, identification card or through the purchase of their hunting, fishing or trapping license. This legislation seeks to allow individuals an additional opportunity to elect to be an organ donor, when filing their income taxes. Under the bill, the Department of Revenue would be required to allow individuals to choose to be an organ donor while filing their taxes.

If an individual chooses to be an organ donor when filing their income taxes they will be added to the state's organ donor registry which is operated in conjunction with existing organ donor registrations at the Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Health Services. Individuals who choose to be an organ donor will not need to select this each year when filing their taxes, once added to the registry they will remain in the registry unless they request to be removed. This is clarified under Senate Amendment 1.

According to Donate Life Wisconsin, nearly three million Wisconsinites are registered organ donors. Every 10 minutes a new organ donor is added to the state's registry. Each donor can save up to eight lives with organ donation and improve 75 lives through eye and tissue donation.

This legislation was drafted in consultation with Versiti.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 868.



Testimony before the Senate Committee on Health

Senate Bill 868

February 14, 2024

Chairwoman Cabral-Guevara and Health Committee members, thank you for providing us an opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 868. I would also like to personally thank co-authors Representative Sapik and Senator Ballweg for their leadership and steadfast commitment to the health of Wisconsin residents in need of an organ transplant.

My name is Anne Krueger, and I am the Director of Organ and Tissue Donation at Versiti Wisconsin, one of two federally designated organ procurement organizations and the primary tissue bank in the State of Wisconsin. I have had the privilege to help thousands of residents get a second chance at life through more than a decade of leadership at Versiti. I am joined today by two Versiti Volunteers, Diane Simmons, wife of a heart recipient, and Annette Washington, a living kidney donor and donor mom who also chairs our advisory board.

As the primary supplier of blood and blood products, organs and tissue throughout eastern Wisconsin, Versiti is committed to advancing solutions that make Wisconsin a national leader in life-saving healthcare. Versiti combines organ procurement services and education to enhance the lives of patients and provide guidance to the families of potential donors.

By the time we complete our testimony today, one new person will have joined the national transplant waiting list. Every eight minutes someone is added to the list. More than 100,000 people are on the transplant waiting list. Sadly, the number of people waiting for an organ or tissue donation vastly exceeds the number of donors. 17 people die each day while waiting for an organ transplant. 1,500 Wisconsinites are on the national organ transplant waiting list. More organ donors are needed to save more lives.

Even though 95% of Americans say they are in favor of organ and tissue donation, only 57% of Wisconsinites are registered donors, the more people who register their decision, the better chances of saving the lives of those waiting. Every donor can save 8



lives and enhance over 75 more. A 20% increase in organ donor registrants could save the lives of nearly 300 Wisconsinites annually.

Annette will now share her experience witnessing her sister suffering during kidney failure.

Diane, whose husband Bill, received his heart transplant 11 years ago, will now speak to how difficult the waiting process is and what the transplant has meant to his quality of life.

We are proud of our longstanding partnership with the State of Wisconsin in promoting this lifesaving donation opportunity through the Department of Transportation, Department of Health Services, and Governor's Celebration of Life event that first launched under the Thompson administration. Versiti looks to deepen its partnership with the state by adding an organ donor registration opt-in option on the state income tax form. This innovative solution will provide convenience for Wisconsinites wanting to join the donor registry and will also build greater awareness to the lifesaving organ donation opportunity.

Wisconsin has an opportunity to burnish the Midwest's credentials as a national leader in organ donation promotion by following Michigan and Minnesota, which have recently enacted similar legislation.

Versiti is also in support of an amendment that would maintain a registrant's donation status on the registry unless the resident requests to be removed. Striking existing ambiguity will ensure that a donor's wishes are granted, should they forget to consistently check the registrant enrollment box. We've come across several situations where donors are inadvertently removed due to this discrepancy. Streamlining the promise will ensure that a donor's wishes are granted and decrease unnecessary burden on the Department of Transportation in maintaining the registry.

It is so fitting that the Committee is considering this legislation on Valentine's Day. In the spirit of compassion for one another, we respectfully request that you approve this legislation and give the more than 1,500 Wisconsinites currently on the transplant waiting list greater opportunity at a second chance on life.

Thank you for your consideration.

Senate Committee on Health
Testimony supporting SB868
Provided by Michael E. Anderson
Director of UW Organ and Tissue Donation
February 14, 2024

Dear Chairperson Cabral-Guevara and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to express our support for Senate Bill 868 (SB868). I am Michael Anderson, Director of UW Organ and Tissue Donation – one of 56 federally designated, not-for-profit, organ procurement organizations, or OPOs in the nation. As an OPO, we work with community partners to promote organ and tissue donation including with clinical teams at over 100 hospitals in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois so they can provide expert support to donor families. We are proud of our long history as leaders in organ and tissue donation. For more than 50 years, UW Organ and Tissue Donation has been recognized as one of the nation's finest OPOs. In fact, we are a HRSA best-practice site and lead the nation in serving deceased organ donors.

It's truly an understatement to say our team is passionate about service, innovation, and education. Each day, we ask ourselves how we can fulfill our vision to identify and maximize opportunities to save lives through organ donation. We are always looking for new ways to draw attention to our cause so when we became aware of legislation establishing an organ donor check-off on Michigan's tax returns, we were thrilled to learn Wisconsin was considering following suit. We applaud Sen. Ballweg and Rep. Sapik for leading SB868 through the Senate and Assembly.

We understand Senate Bill 868 would require the Department of Revenue to update Wisconsin's income tax forms so a resident of Wisconsin who is at least 15 years old or an emancipated minor could elect to be listed as a donor on the anatomical gift registry. This would open a new avenue that allows the people of Wisconsin to make their decision consistent with other methods signed into law in recent years. I am referring to legislation passed and signed last session that allows a resident to sign up for the donor registry via their hunting, trapping, and fishing license. Furthermore, we believe an amendment to SB868 will be considered that would be very helpful in alleviating some confusion that has come to light as new opportunities to sign up as a donor have been implemented. We are grateful to the authors of SB868 for seeking to clarify legislative intent that an individual remains on the donor list unless they explicitly state otherwise.

Please join us in supporting this effort to expand the list of those willing to give the gift of life through organ and tissue donation. Our position is aligned with research indicating that 95 percent of Americans are in favor of being a donor but only 57 percent are registered. We see Senate Bill 868 as an additional means of closing the gap between those who support donations and those who register as donors – and we need all the help we can get because the number of people waiting for an organ or tissue donation

vastly exceeds the number of donors. Today, there are more than 1500 individuals living in Wisconsin waiting for a life-saving transplant. Sadly, every day, an estimated 17 people in the U.S. will die waiting for an organ.

On that somber note, I would be happy to take questions from committee members at this time.

References:

1. <https://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/data/view-data-reports/state-data/>
2. <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02300.pdf>
3. <https://www.organdonor.gov/sites/default/files/organ-donor/professional/grants-research/national-survey-organ-donation-2012.pdf>