

Members of The Insurance and Real Estate Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Robin Gilmartin and I live in West Hartford, Connecticut. I support H.B. No. 6387, AN ACT CONCERNING INSURANCE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LIVING ORGAN DONORS.

First, I'm so happy for a member of this legislative body, Rep. Jeff Currey, who received the gift of life in January this year. Congratulations to Rep. Currey and to his now kidney sister, Karen Gauvain.

In 2017, I donated a kidney at Yale-New Haven Hospital to someone I didn't know. My donation started an 18-person "kidney chain," that is, 9 organ donors donating to strangers, thereby guaranteeing loved ones with advanced kidney disease a life-saving organ.

Living organ donors are desperately needed. Organs from deceased individuals are often difficult to procure and there are simply not enough deceased organ donors to meet the needs. There are 118,000 Americans currently on the national organ transplant list; 1,240 are our neighbors here in Connecticut. 83% are waiting for a kidney. Many of those waiting will be removed from the list because they either become too sick or die waiting for an organ. This was the case for 125 Connecticut residents in 2020.

Since this Bill was first introduced in this Committee one year ago, the pandemic has taken a toll on live organ transplantation as many centers across the country limited or suspended live transplants amidst the crisis. Here in Connecticut, living donor transplants fell from 92 in 2019 to only 64 in 2020.

The needs are great but there are barriers to increasing living organ donation. One barrier is the misconception that donating a kidney is risky and will impact the donor's health or life expectancy. Another is that the donor will suffer negative consequences such as loss of wages or denial of insurance.

Here's the important thing to know: There is no evidence that donating a kidney adversely affects health or life expectancy. Increased insurance premiums or denial of coverage are based on misconception, not evidence.

We should reduce any barriers to living organ donors, including any form of insurance discrimination, to increase donation. Public policy should reflect the need and have the backs of every living organ donor by ensuring they are not penalized by any form of insurance discrimination. By barring discrimination, this legislation will eliminate a barrier to living donation, thereby saving lives.

I thank the Committee for considering my testimony.

Robin M. Gilmartin  
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