

Testimony for Bill HB 6387 (Living Donor Protection Act)

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My name is Sheila Sokolski and I am a living kidney donor who donated my left kidney on July 25, 2018 to Debbie Lanagan. I did not meet Debbie until after I had been approved to be her donor.

I learned about Debbie's need for a living kidney donor through my longtime friend and work colleague, Erin Concepcion. Debbie is her childhood friend who has Polycystic Kidney Disease and was diagnosed with renal failure after the birth of her son, Matthew who was born just one month after my youngest daughter, Clara. I have never had any health issues and could not imagine not being healthy enough to actively participate in my children growing up.

The process to be approved as a living organ donor is extensive. Blood tests and kidney function tests, in addition to body scans are all conducted to ensure the donor is in optimal health. Studies show that the average life expectancy of a living organ donor is longer than the average life expectancy - not due to the donation itself, but due to the fact that you have to be in such good health to donate. From the time I left the hospital after surgery, my creatinine levels have never been above the normal range, despite having only one kidney.

The process also includes meeting with a living donor advocate, nurses, and counselors to ensure that the donor is well-informed and mentally suited for donation. As part of that process you are asked if you have the financial resources to be out of work for surgery and recovery. I am extremely lucky that my employer offers a generous fully paid organ donor leave. I would have been eligible for full pay and benefits for up to 6 weeks, even though in my case I returned to work just two and a half weeks after my surgery.

The team at Hartford Hospital also advised me that there had been cases where living donors had been discriminated against when trying to procure insurance after donation, and that I needed to take this into consideration. I have group life insurance through my employer and knew that would not be impacted. If I ever changed employers, however, I could be denied supplemental coverage based on my donation. As a precautionary measure, I took out an additional individual term life policy in an amount equivalent to the amount of group coverage I have to ensure my family was protected in the case that I left my current employer. Not all potential donors have the financial resources to take this step that I did.

David Sultzer, of Maryland, who is a military veteran was deployed multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan after he donated his Kidney to his mother in 2007. Following his donation, but before these deployments, he applied for a life insurance policy only to be denied coverage from Monumental Life. His declination letter indicated that since he only had one kidney he did not qualify for life insurance and was considered a health risk. I am sure you can imagine how devastating this was for David, even though he would never change his decision to save his mother's life.

My recipient, Debbie, is now healthy, back to work as a special education teacher, and able to lead an active life with her husband and two children. This would not have been possible without receiving a kidney transplant. There are many barriers that prevent people from becoming living donors, but fear

of not being able to procure insurance - which they are healthy enough to otherwise qualify for should not be one of them.

Thank you.