

House Public Policy Committee
October 11, 2023
House Bill 256
Ryan Zinn, Heart Recipient

Good morning, Chairman Lipps and Members of the House Public Policy Committee. My name is Ryan Zinn, and I am a Senior Technology Officer at The Ohio State University and serve on the Governing Board of Lifeline of Ohio.

In 1988 and a sophomore in high school, I was confronted with my own mortality. I was a healthy 15-year-old athlete when a sudden illness damaged my heart. I was placed on the national waitlist for a life-saving organ transplant. I needed a heart. And I needed it fast.

After only seventeen days on the list, I was one of the lucky ones. A heart was found and the match was perfect. But as I prepared to enter the operating room at the Cleveland Clinic with my family praying for my safe return, I realized that another family was grieving over the loss of their son. That family's decision to choose donation to help a stranger, during the darkest days of their lives, speaks of the courage and selflessness that we all aspire to achieve in our own lives. Every day I live now, each step I take, and every life that I touch is a tribute to my heart donor, James, and his family.

Because of James and his family, I completed high school on time, set a school track record and delivered a graduation speech as valedictorian. Because of their gift of life, I was able to earn not one, but two engineering degrees from The Ohio State University. And, the biggest gift my donor gave me was the ability to spend my life with my lovely wife and our daughter, who is named after my donor hero. We just celebrated our 10-year wedding anniversary,

Because of my lifesaving gift, I was able to compete in several US and International Transplant Games and have been fortunate enough to win 35 medals in track, table tennis and volleyball and run in two Olympic Torch Relays.

Participating in those games was a way for me to hopefully provide hope and inspiration to others. And although I may not have realized it at the time, they also guided me toward the advocacy work I was meant to do when my athletic days were past.

I have had the privilege of sharing my story throughout the Central Ohio community and beyond. As a Lifeline of Ohio Board Member, I have talked with legislators in Washington D. C. letting them know the impact donation has had on my life and advocated for organ, eye and tissue donation.

This year, I celebrate 35 years since I received my Gift of Life. I am sharing my story today so that you will know that we need help. We need more donors. Because without them, success stories like mine and so many others will never be.

Today, more than 100,000 people across the country are waiting for an organ transplant – approximately 3,000 of them live in Ohio. They are our colleagues, neighbors, friends and family. This bill will increase the opportunity for Ohioans to register their decision to be an organ donor in the Ohio Donor Registry. And ultimately save and heal the lives of people just like me.

As human beings, we sometimes find ourselves thinking about our legacy. What can we leave behind that will tell others about us? I am the legacy of my heart donor James - one young man and his family who thought of others when called upon.

Through this bill, all of you can be part of a legacy of donation, the effects of which will be felt for generations to come.