

I am Jennifer Herr from Metamora, Ohio, and I have witnessed firsthand the incredible power of organ donation. I am the mother and long-time caregiver of our daughter, Allison, who received her life-saving liver transplant on January 21, 2006. I encourage you, without a doubt, to pass HB 256.

Right now, 103,460 people are on the national transplant waiting list, including 2,523 in our Buckeye state alone. Twenty of them will die today waiting for their second chance at life.

Biliary atresia caused Allison's liver to shut down. I vividly remember going home with what I thought was a healthy baby on day three, only to receive a message that we needed to return immediately to PICU for further testing on "abnormal" labs. Unbeknownst to us, that message left in June of 2003 would spiral our life out of control.

I want to give you a little background on what a recipient family goes through on the national transplant waiting list. Allison was finally put on the waiting list at age one, and every doctor's appointment was a constant reminder that she was a "healthy sick" baby. She was sick, but not sick enough to be at the top of the waiting list, where she might be lucky enough to receive a transplant, so we had to wait for the unknown. Our family, including Allison's four-year-old and two-year-old siblings, shut our lives down and watched as a liver disease was slowly taking our youngest daughter's life from the inside out.

A transplant was the only option for Allison to survive. Watching our child slowly die before our eyes was daunting to say the least. I was an RN, and I put my career on hold. We are thankfully a full-time, self-employed, family farm operation, which got us through the wait, transition and transplant. I became a full-time caregiver at home with central line care, feeding tubes and close to 10 medications throughout the day to sustain Allison's life while on the waiting list. Allison did not meet her milestones like a typical toddler. She was nonverbal and learned sign language. She did not eat; her nutrition was via her feeding tube in her nose. She did not walk until she was almost 18 months, and she slept up to 20 hours a day because her energy was nonexistent. She had a large, obtunded belly, and her skin was the color of an orange pumpkin due to the bilirubin backup.

The days turned into weeks, the weeks turned into months, the months turned into a year, and we were losing hope that a liver would become available before her time was up. One year and six months, 548 days, 78 weeks, 13,149 hours... waiting for a life-saving match. Our lives changed when our phone rang a little after midnight on January 21, 2006. At 2 1/2 years old, Allison was going to receive the life-saving liver transplant she needed so desperately. I am beyond grateful to be able to tell you an incredibly successful transplant story. Allison is a healthy, thriving 20-year-old young lady. She works full time on our family farm, trains horses and rodeos across Ohio. To see her today, you would never know that when she was a baby, every night, we would pray for just one more day with her. The past 17+ years have been made possible because someone said "yes" to organ donation.

Waiting for a transplant is challenging on so many levels for transplant candidates and their families and caregivers. It is a double-edged sword knowing that your loved one's gift of life means another family endured a tragedy. But their selflessness in what must be their darkest hours translates to a true miracle through the gift of life. A second chance is given to grateful transplant recipients like Allison. We have the ability to take the burden off our families during those tragic times by saying "yes" to saving lives through organ donation through the opportunity provided by HB 256. This legislation could mean thousands more lives like Allison's can be saved through organ donation, and so many more families could be comforted knowing that their loved ones are true heroes and live on in others through organ donation.

I encourage you to pass HB 256, as the decision to join the Ohio Donor Registry truly means the difference between life and death. Thank you for your time and consideration.