

Senate Health Committee

April 24, 2024

House Bill 256

Sara Huffman, Chief Quality Officer, Lifeline of Ohio

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee,

My name is Sara Huffman, Chief Quality Officer at Lifeline of Ohio, the organ procurement organization that serves Central and Southeastern Ohio. I am also the daughter of an organ donor. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you today.

When I was a junior in high school, I was in the marching band. I was lucky to have parents who were my number one fans – always helping the band when they could and supporting me. After winning the grand champions at our first competition of the season, my dad found me, gave me a huge hug and told me that he loved me and was proud of me. The next morning, my dad had a brain aneurysm that ruptured. Despite all the best efforts of medical staff at the local hospital, he died the following day.

When my mom was asked about organ donation, she included my brother and me in the decision process. This occurred in 1999, before the Ohio Donor Registry was created, and we had never discussed donation together as a family so we were unsure what my dad would have wanted.

Honestly, it was challenging to make the decision at the time because we were facing an unexpected tragedy. To make our decision, we reflected on who my dad was.

My dad was a “Renaissance man.” An electrician by trade, he somehow knew how to do everything from helping me with my chemistry lab, to roasting a delicious ham, to fixing up our family’s old cottage at Indian Lake. The cottage, purchased just two years before my dad died, quickly became my family’s sanctuary. It was the place where we spent weekends together, celebrated birthdays, played games, went on boat rides, and more than anything else,

fished. My dad taught me how to bait a hook, cast a line, hook a fish and enjoy the moment during the wait. I remember him hiding under our giant sycamore tree during a rainstorm with a line in the water still trying to catch fish. He loved it.

With all his talents and skills, he was well known for being the first to step up and offer help when needed. That is what inspired us to say “yes” to donation.

His liver was given to a 60-year-old retired postal worker. He was able to give the gift of a kidney to a 44-year-old with a 12-year-old daughter, another kidney to a 38-year-old who battled diabetes and a pancreas for a 35-year-old who no longer had to take insulin.

My dad's heart went to a 58-year-old man named Fuad, whom my mom and I got to meet thanks to a process coordinated by the organ procurement organization. He and his wife, Janet, who he met and married after his transplant, owned a discount grocery store, and embraced us as family. During our visit, he taught me how to eat a whole lobster, shared how he worked as a taxidermist for an aquarium and let us listen to his heart with a stethoscope. For years, we chatted on the phone, exchanged cards and emails, and shared a constant bond through my dad's heart. Fuad lived another 24 years, until he passed away in June at 82 years old.

Five lives were saved on September 20, 1999 – from a decision that Ohioans can now make by adding their names to Ohio Donor Registry.

The ripple effect of my dad's donation had a profound impact on me. It's what connected me to Lifeline of Ohio as a wide-eyed college intern and started my commitment to this work. In 2010, I joined the community education team, where I spent my days educating youth about donation, hoping my experience inspired people to become registered donors, talk to their families about donation and help people who may have experienced a loss themselves.

Providing Ohioans with more opportunities to register their decision to be a donor allows families facing tragedy to honor their loved one's decision and leave a lifesaving legacy and gives those on the transplant waiting list a second chance at life.

Thank you,

Sara Huffman