



Monday, April 22, 2024

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on behalf of Abbi's Echo and as a Donor recipient myself and the parent of a child who was an organ donor at fifteen years old.

My name is Matthew Carey. I am a retired Fire chief and current pensioner of the Ohio Police and Fire pension system. I come from a family of firefighters. My dad was one, and my brothers are active full-time firefighters in Ohio. On February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, I received a heart transplant due to my service since 2001 as a Firefighter/Paramedic in Ohio. It was determined to be due to prolonged exposure to smoke, heat, and other chemicals during my career. I retired on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023. We lost our daughter Abigail Marie Carey on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023, due to injuries sustained in an Automobile accident on February 18<sup>th</sup> in Springfield Township, Richland County. Abigail had just recently turned 15 years old. Abigail wanted to and was able to be an organ donor. She was able to save the lives of four people along with providing the gift of sight for two and donate other organs for research including child safety restraints.

### **Abbi's Connection to Proposed H.B. 256**

Our family has always been avid outdoor and hunting enthusiasts. We enjoy Ohio's outdoors, whether outside hunting or shooting sports such as trapshooting and archery. Abigail had been working hard to learn how to shoot a crossbow with her brother, Ryan. She wanted to take her hunter safety course to hunt deer in December 2022. We signed her up, and she completed the online hunter education course in just a few days—something I figured would take her weeks. On December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, she harvested her first deer and did it with a crossbow.

### **Abigail wanted to be an Organ donor.**

Since I had previously been a Heart transplant recipient, Abbi understood what it was all about at an early age. My diagnosis and transplant happened in a short amount of time. I was diagnosed in December of 2020, and my transplant happened at Cleveland Clinic in February of 2021. The entire time, due to Covid, I was separated from my family at home while I was at the Hospital. Abigail lived through the experience, realizing the importance of being a donor. Abigail, being so young, did not yet have a driver's license. So, she did not have a state form or way to show those wishes. Her siblings, cousins, and family had already had the chance to make that decision. Abbi's older sister, Katelynn, had just recently gotten her license, and Abigail wanted something to show that, too.

### **Mission**

To remember Abigail, support her dreams, interests, and memory.  
We will strive to educate on organ donation and seatbelt safety.



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### **Abigail and the accident**

We had been talking about getting Abigail a state-issued ID so she had something showing what she so dearly wanted: that she was an organ donor. We never got the chance. On February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Abbi and Ryan were coming home from fishing. A mechanical issue caused the jeep they were driving to unsuccessfully negotiate a turn on Lexington Ontario Road in Richland County, Ohio. They struck a culvert, and Abbi was ejected from the vehicle. She became pinned under the vehicle. The very fire department I had just retired from responded and found Abigail in Cardiac arrest. They removed her from under the Jeep and transported her to the local Trauma hospital in Mansfield, Ohio. It was determined that she had internal bleeding and other severe injuries and needed to be flown to Children's Hospital in Columbus. The doctor at Mansfield did emergency surgery to stop the bleeding from her spleen, and she was flown to Columbus. My daughter fought hard, but it was determined on February 25<sup>th</sup> that she was brain dead. On February 26<sup>th</sup> she received an honor walk as she was taken to surgery for the organ donation process. In some ways, we were lucky. Abigail had already been exposed to the entire donation situation. We knew her wishes, and we knew what she wanted.

### **Understanding and conclusion**

If proposed House Bill 256 had been enacted, Abigail would have gotten the chance to use the hyperlink then to be placed on the registry. The subject of organ donation must be discussed and talked about with everyone, young and old. Including this in all those who register for a hunting license is another avenue to get that thought and discussion done. Organ donation is a considerable decision. It is also one that many don't want to think about. That is why it is essential to ensure we provide the opportunity for Ohioans to have this subject at the forefront when they are getting a driver's license and a hunting license. It could save a life like it did in my case or save four other lives like it did in my daughter's case. You in this room may not realize it today, but you have a tremendous opportunity to save others. This simple bill will help to do just that. Save the lives of fellow Ohioans and many others across our country. Abigail's gifts ended up as far as California.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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