



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

William Larkin

## Senate Recognizes National Donate Life Month And Passes Bills To Encourage More New Yorkers To Become Lifesaving Donors

WILLIAM LARKIN April 11, 2016



The New York State Senate today recognized April as “National Donate Life” month, passing legislation and a resolution to encourage more New Yorkers to become organ and tissue donors. The bills focus on enhancing public awareness and increasing the number of New Yorkers who sign up to help save lives through organ, tissue, bone marrow, and blood donation.

Senate Majority Leader and Coalition Co-Leader John J. Flanagan said, “No one ever wants to be in a position of needing a life-saving transplant for themselves or someone close to them, but it is critical that we increase the number of donors to give more people a chance to survive. Right at this moment, nearly 10,000 New Yorkers are waiting for that chance. The measures we passed today build upon the Senate’s commitment to raise awareness of organ and tissue donors and would be instrumental to helping more people live long, healthy lives.”

Senate Independent Democratic Conference Leader and Coalition Co-Leader Jeff Klein (D, Bronx/ Westchester) said, “Organ and tissue donation can make the difference between life and death. By taking these legislative steps the New York State Senate hopes to increase participation in organ and tissue donor programs that will undoubtedly save lives.”

Only 25 percent of potential New Yorkers are enrolled in the New York State Donate Life Registry -- the second lowest rate in the nation. The Senate has been advocating for additional resources and raising public awareness of the importance of organ and tissue donation through legislation and funding. Earlier this month, the enacted state budget included \$1 million to support the New York Alliance for Donation – an increase of \$750,000 over last year – as part of the Senate’s ongoing commitment to help New Yorkers in dire need of transplants.

To further increase public awareness of donation, especially among youth, a bill ([S7003](#)) sponsored by Senator Flanagan would help educate high school students about organ, tissue, bone marrow, and blood donation. In New York, the current age of consent to register as a bone marrow and organ and tissue donor is 18. The age of consent to donate blood is 17 (or 16 with parental consent). This measure would help high school students make informed decisions when they reach the age of consent by requiring state Education officials to develop recommendations for instruction in blood, bone marrow, organ, and tissue

donations and the life saving benefits each provide.

The Senate also passed a bill ([S5313A](#)) sponsored by Senator Kemp Hannon (R, Nassau) to help increase the number of organ and tissue donors by lowering the age of consent for New Yorkers who choose to become a donor. New York is one of only four states in the nation that requires an individual be 18 or older to enroll in an organ and tissue donor registry. This leaves young people without a mechanism to document their consent to donate and puts parents in the difficult situation of having to assume what their teenage child would have wanted should a tragedy occur. This legislation will give New Yorkers aged 16 or older who wish to consent to donation the ability to enroll in the state's Donate Life Registry. However, in the event that the young person may be considered for organ, eye, or tissue donation, the parents of that individual will be notified and given the final authorization for donation to take place.

Another measure ([S6952A](#)) also sponsored by Senator Hannon would provide an additional opportunity for New Yorkers to document their decision to enroll as an organ and tissue donor. All applicants for health insurance offered through the state health benefit exchange would be provided space during the application process to register for the Donate Life Registry for organ, eye, and tissue donations.

Senator Hannon, Chairman of the Health Committee, said, "According to the New York Alliance for Donation, 1,700 New Yorkers have been on a waiting list for more than five years. As a state we must and can do more to ensure those in need of organs can be saved through transplantation. The legislation we passed today will help increase the number of people on the Donor Registry and save lives."

The Senate passed a bill ([S6528](#)), sponsored by Senator David Carlucci (D, Rockland/Westchester), that would make "Lauren's Law" permanent in New York. Lauren's

Law is named after 12-year-old heart transplant survivor Lauren Shields of Stony Point, New York, and makes it easier to choose to be a donor when enrolling for a driver's license. The law prohibits a driver's license application from being processed unless the organ donation section is filled out. Applicants have to check a box stating "yes" or "skip this question." Prior to the law's enactment, filling out the organ donation section on the application was optional. The law is currently set to expire in October.

Senator Carlucci said, "Allowing Lauren's Law to sunset would be a major setback, putting the lives of the thousands of men, women, and children who are waiting for a life-saving transplant in jeopardy. This is a setback that we as New Yorkers could not afford. With today's vote to make Lauren's Law permanent, this will increase eligible donors and expand our state's registry. I truly want to thank the namesake for this bill, Lauren Shields, for her tireless advocacy and inspirational message of hope. I am so proud to work with her and advocates across New York who made this possible. Now this bill moves to the Assembly, where I urge my colleagues to support it."

The Senate also passed legislation ([S7013A](#)), sponsored by Senator Susan Serino (R-C-I, Hyde Park), to help medical transport teams operate within their necessary and sensitive time frames. The bill would add human organ delivery vehicles to the list of authorized emergency vehicles in the state.

Senator Serino said, "When lives are on the line, you cannot afford to waste a single second. This common sense legislation will ensure that those who are in line for the organs they need to survive do not have to watch the minutes tick by as their organs sit in traffic. Should this bill become law, it would take effect immediately, so I urge my colleagues in both houses to make it a priority. If you have ever met someone who has been on a wait-list for an organ, then you know they've waited long enough."

The bills will be sent to the Assembly.