



For Immediate Release
January 11, 2007

Contact: Kim McCullough
630-758-2736
630-209-1320 (cell)

POLL FINDS LARGE GAP BETWEEN SUPPORT FOR DONATION AND ACTUAL DONOR REGISTRATIONS IN ILLINOIS

'Donate Life' campaign launched to register 3.5 million in state's new donor registry

CHICAGO— A recent statewide poll shows that nearly 90% of Illinois adults say registering to be an organ/tissue donor is the right thing to do.

Yet, 40% say they have not registered. In addition, of adults who identify themselves as registered donors, nearly half are unaware of a new Illinois donor registry established a year ago. Nearly two-thirds are unaware of the need to re-register.

Acting on the poll results and the growing waiting list for organ transplants—now up to nearly 4,700 patients in Illinois—a coalition of agencies involved with organ, tissue and eye donation today announced the launch of "Donate Life Illinois." The initiative is an 18-month campaign to register 3.5 million people in the state's new donor registry managed by the office of Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White. Currently, nearly 1.5 million Illinoisans have joined.

Donate Life Illinois is part of a national campaign through Donate Life America to increase the number of Americans who have taken action to be donors in their states to 100 million. Currently, an estimated 60 million Americans have done so, according to David Bosch, Donate Life America president and communications director for Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network.

"The poll reinforced what we've observed for years in educating the public about donation, that most people procrastinate in documenting a decision," said Bosch, who leads the Illinois campaign. "In addition, it suggests that a lot of people are willing to donate life provided we can tell them about the new registry, explain it takes just 20 seconds to register, and make it easy to register now—you don't have to wait until the next time you go to the DMV."

The poll of 800 Illinois adults, conducted by Fako & Associates on behalf of Gift of Hope, found that 87% of Illinois adults believe donation is the right thing to do. The percentage is consistent with national research by Donate Life America, Gallup and other organizations over the last 15 years.

The most likely demographic to register as donors are women under age 50. Of non-registered residents asked why they haven't registered, top reasons recorded were that they assumed they were too old or ill to donate (22%), or they just hadn't thought about it (19%).

In addition, while 52% of registered donors are aware of Illinois' new donor registry launched Jan. 1, 2006, only 32% of donors are aware it requires them to re-register to ensure their donation wishes are honored.

(MORE)

Under Illinois' previous "donor intent" registry, an individual could register intent to donate, but family members or another legal authority were required to give additional consent for donation to take place.

The state's new "donor consent" registry was established to ensure donors' end-of-life wishes are honored and to help save and help the lives of more patients awaiting organ, tissue and eye transplants. Virtually anyone can become a donor; medical eligibility is determined at the time of an individual's death.

Donate Life Illinois launches this month with online communities through a campaign website at www.IAmAreYou.org, a Donate Life Illinois blog and nearly 1,000 friends and advocates on MySpace.

In February and March, the campaign's partner agencies will train volunteers throughout the state on how to coordinate donor registration stations within their communities in time for National Donate Life Month in April.

Six Illinois colleges and universities are coordinating donor registration outreach on their campuses as part of a special "I M. R U?" college campaign. Through Students for Organ Donation chapters or their Public Relations Student Society of America chapters, participating colleges signed on include: Loyola University, Northwestern University, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Bradley University, Eastern Illinois University and Northern Illinois University.

Meanwhile, over the next three months, major employers throughout the state will be approached to take part by providing information to employees and hosting "virtual" donor registration drives or on-site donor drives in conjunction with blood drives or similar workplace campaigns.

Illinoisans can join the new donor registry by visiting the campaign site at www.IAmAreYou.org; visiting any Illinois state driver's license facility; or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at 800/210-2106.

To learn more about organ, tissue, eye and blood donation, visit www.IAmAreYou.org and click on "Partners," or contact Donate Life Illinois at 888/307-DON8 (3668).

About Donate Life Illinois

Donate Life Illinois is a coalition of agencies responsible for organ, tissue, eye and blood donation, as well as donor registration and education in Illinois. It is one of 45 regional coalitions and 50 national businesses or associations making up Donate Life America, a not-for-profit alliance that serves as a national voice and inspires all people to save and enhance lives through organ, eye and tissue donation.

Donate Life Illinois member organizations include:

- American Liver Foundation-Illinois
- Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network
- Illinois Coalition of Community Blood Centers
- Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program
- Mid-America Transplant Services
- Midwest Eye-Banks and Transplantation Center/Illinois Eye-Bank
- Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation
- National Kidney Foundation of Illinois

(MORE)

About Illinois' new donor registry and why it's important to re-register

Put away the pens. You no longer need to sign the back of your driver's license or make sure your family will give additional consent for you to become a donor after you register as an organ/tissue donor. Illinois' new donor registry makes your decision legally binding and ensures your wishes will be honored.

What?

Managed by the Illinois Secretary of State's office, Illinois' new organ/tissue donor registry is a confidential computerized database that documents a person's consent to be a donor. Under a state law that went into effect Jan. 1, 2006, registration makes your decision to be a donor legally binding. Additional witnesses or family consent is no longer required, although donation agencies will keep family members informed at the time of your death and provide information afterward.

Who?

Adults only. Although it is still important to learn about and discuss donation with your family at an early age, only adults 18 years or older can legally register as an organ/tissue donor in Illinois. Virtually anyone can become a donor; medical eligibility is determined at the time of an individual's death.

Why?

The new registry ensures your wishes will be honored and ultimately help save hundreds of more lives every year—when everyone who was registered in the old registry re-registers in the new one. The state could not automatically transfer names from the old registry to the new one, thus the need to re-register. Anyone who has registered as a donor after Jan. 1, 2006, is included in the new registry.

Where?

Illinoisans can register to become organ/tissue donors by visiting the campaign site at www.IAmAreYou.org, filling out a donor registration card, visiting any Illinois state driver's license facility; or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at 1-800-210-2106.

When?

TODAY! It takes 20 seconds to go online to www.IAmAreYou.org and register or re-register your decision to be an organ/tissue donor to ensure you are part of the new registry.

#