

05/12/2014

Dear Representatives,

First of all, I want to thank you for considering and supporting House Bill 30 (Donate Life PA Act). I am a donor mom and this bill is extremely important to me and my family. Most importantly, it will help save lives.

My life was forever changed on November 27, 2008 when we got the phone call that no parent ever wants to receive. York Hospital called our house and informed my husband that our son, Zac, was involved in a motor vehicle crash and was in critical condition. We needed to get to the hospital right away. I never thought that we would receive that kind of phone call. I'm not really sure why but I didn't think anything like that would ever happen to us. I'm here to tell you that it does happen, every single day. For us, that day just happened to be Thanksgiving. Most people spend Thanksgiving Day gathering with family and friends and celebrating all of the blessings they have been given. We found ourselves in the hospital, hoping and praying that our son would survive his injuries. Zac suffered massive, closed head trauma as the result of being hit by an underage impaired driver while he was on his way home from his girlfriend's house. Zachary eventually succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced brain dead three days later. Lucky for us, we knew that Zac wanted to be an organ donor. He made that designation at the age of 16 when he got his drivers license. I don't remember having a specific conversation about it but I can remember him saying "Why wouldn't I, Mom? If I can't use them, give them to someone who can!" That statement is a reflection of my son's heart. He spent the 20 years he had here helping others. He had a passion for people and a desire to help.

When the time came in the hospital to talk about organ donation, our family felt that we weren't actually making a decision to do that; Zac had done that 4 years prior. We were just honoring his wishes. We were supported throughout the entire process and were treated with nothing but respect by the hospital staff and the organ donor program. As a result of Zac's gifts, six individuals were given a second chance at life. His decision to become an organ donor was the best decision he ever made, second only to his faith and belief in Jesus Christ.

Our family has made a commitment to share Zac's story at every opportunity we are given. As part of that commitment, I speak to high school students on a regular basis. My niece is a high school Health and Phys Ed teacher and I speak to her 10th grade students several times a year. I talk to them about the dangers and consequences of impaired driving and the blessings and miracles of organ donation. I believe organ and tissue donation awareness should be taught in every high school and college in Pennsylvania. This Bill will help to promote this much needed education.

I understand that there has been some opposition to House Bill 30, mainly from a group of coroners in the state. I've seen some of the things they are saying and I can tell you that the statements they've made are inaccurate and disrespectful to me and my family. It should be the donor family who makes the decision as to whether donation takes place or not, not a Coroner or Medical Examiner. I can honestly say that if we did not have Zachary's donation story, I'm not sure where I would be today. There is no greater grief than losing a child but to lose your child because of another's negligent and illegal act makes it even harder. Zac's donation story has been the blessing that has come out of our tragedy. Knowing that six lives were saved the day my son died gives me hope. I know that the emergency workers and hospital staff did everything possible to save Zac's life. There are also false statements circulating about the inability to have an open casket viewing after organ donation. This is completely inaccurate. We were able to have an open casket viewing for Zac and there was no visible evidence of the transplant process. The transplant surgeons maintained dignity and respect for Zac and our family at all times during the transplant process.

I know a man who was given the gift of life by a family after their son died of head trauma. That family was able to designate their son's liver to this man in their community. This Bill continues to offer this option to a grieving donor family, which I personally think is awesome.

In closing, as both a donor mom and a victim survivor of a DUI crash, I want to encourage you to continue to support and promote House Bill 30. This Bill saves lives. I hope and pray that you never find yourself in the situation that our family faced almost six years ago, but if you do, I hope you think about the hope that organ and tissue donation gives to both potential recipients waiting for a life saving donation and to a grieving family who will know that their loved one is leaving a legacy of life and love.

Sincerely,

Missy Sweitzer – Donor Mom and Zac's Voice