

Written Testimony

In Support of HB 2622

An Act to Establish an Organ Donor Registry and Public Awareness Fund

January 29, 2019

My name is Leslie Coefield and I am a resident of Portland, Oregon. I am here today to support HB 2622.

I would like to thank State Representative Mitch Greenlick and the House Committee on Health Care for allowing me to testify on behalf of the Organ Donor Registry and Public Awareness Fund.

I have been a longtime volunteer and advocate for Donate Life NW for 25 years. Prior to my involvement with Donate Life, the closest I ever came to thinking about organ and tissue donation was to have a "D" on my Driver's License. I would like to share my story to tell you how that all changed.

Brian Jack, my youngest son, was born on December 13, 1985. He was my "surprise" baby – one I was told would never be arriving – 9 months and 3 weeks after the adoption of his older brother Colin from Korea. Brian was blond, sweet, and full of life. As a little boy his plan was to play baseball forever, because it his favorite sport – one that he was really good at. And when he grew up, he was going to be a fireman. But the growing up part never happened.

Brian was seven years old on February 18, 1993 when I dropped him and Colin off at school. I had no way of knowing that I would never see Brian alive again. It was a normal day. After school, Brian and Colin went to a recreation center with a neighbor to pick up the neighbor's daughter from a gymnastics class. Nobody expected that a 250 –lb. roll of linoleum left unattended by remodelers would knock Brian to the floor causing a traumatic head injury. At the ER at OHSU, I learned that Brian had died due to a herniated brain stem. Unfortunately, accidents and unexpected deaths do occur, and there is no way to prepare for these untimely events. To try to measure the effect of his death has had on me defies words. I miss my son every day – more, not less, as the years go by.

One of the last decisions I would make for Brian as his Mom was that he would give the gift of sight and life by being a tissue donor, giving his corneas and heart valves. Having that choice made me feel empowered, that I could help others through this selfless act. I have never regretted my decision, and it has given me great comfort to know that something good could come for the loss of my son. Brian's corneas were used to restore sight in two young people and the heart valves went to someone in need. Many years ago, I was sharing my story with my older son Colin's Cub Scout group, and at the end, I asked if there were any questions. Colin raised his hand and with total innocence and sincerity asked if the person that received Brian's eyes would see the world as he did. I hold that thought near and dear. Intellectually, I know this is not how transplantation works, but in my heart I know that those who see the world through Brian's eyes see a truly awesome place.

Sharing my story through the Donate Life Speakers Bureau and talking to people about the need for organ and tissue donation has become my mission over the last several years. By increasing the revenue for Donate Life, it will allow them to expand their outreach efforts and inform many more Oregonians through the student and community education programs, as well as enhancing their awareness campaigns. Learning the facts will allow individuals to arrive at an informed decision.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today, and I strongly urge you to vote to pass House Bill 2622.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Coefield

Donor Mom

7240 SW 76th Ave.

Portland, OR 97223