

## Written Testimony

### In Support of HB 2622 An Act to Establish Organ Donor Registry and Public Awareness Fund

My name is Nicole Andergard and I am a native Oregonian – raised on the Oregon Coast, educated at the University of Oregon and currently residing in Portland. Thank you all for allowing me time to testify on behalf of Donate Life NW in support of HB2622.

People don't regularly talk about organ donation the way they might discuss the Portland Trailblazer's record or their favorite boutique coffee shop. However, once it becomes personal – organ donation becomes an urgent conversation – a conversation of literal life and death.

In early 2007 I didn't give much thought to organ donation, but I did have concern for my lifelong best friend. My best friend Anna and I met when we were just five years old. We were born just five days apart at the same hospital, attended by the same doctor, and we became fast friends upon entering kindergarten. One afternoon while swimming we noticed we had matching butterfly-shaped birthmarks. We concocted an elaborate story that we were really sisters, separated at birth, and we had reunited as five-year-olds.

Fast forward through graduations, marriages and babies, Anna and I were still as close as ever, but both of our lives were about to change forever. Anna was suffering medical complications from an autoimmune disease called Lupus, and one cold night in February her kidneys shut down. For her, this event kicked off nearly a year of dialysis and challenging medical treatments, and for me, it kicked off nine months of being tested to become her living kidney donor.

I didn't know much of anything about living donation. All I knew was that my friend was suffering and becoming weaker and weaker with every dialysis treatment she completed. I didn't know what could qualify me to become her living kidney donor. I didn't know what could disqualify me either.

I began seeking information, desperate to help Anna in any way that I could. After a crash course in organ donation with the help of a donor advocate, and nine months of waiting and testing and waiting and testing, we were finally given approval and a November transplant date.

Our medical team was encouraged by our genetic testing in particular. One of the tests completed before transplant is to test for antigens. For our transplant, they tested eight different antigens. The more matching antigens, the less anti-rejection medication is necessary. Because we were not related, we were told to expect a zero out of eight antigen match. I think only our medical team was surprised when our test results revealed we were a 6 out of 8 antigen match. We were suddenly once again reminded of those matching butterfly-shaped birthmarks and our childhood fantasy that we were really sisters, separated at birth.

Our transplant was a success and 11 years later, my best friend's new kidney continues to serve her well. We no longer need to pretend we are sisters, because now we share something even more special, we share the gift of life.

It is imperative to note, without a directed living kidney donor, my best friend would have waited years for a kidney. Today, I am a volunteer with Donate Life NW doing my best to educate others on organ donation – especially living donation. There are currently 698 people on the kidney transplant waiting list in the state of Oregon, most will wait at least three to five years before they can stop dialysis

treatment and get on living their lives. Through funding for Donate Life NW, we can increase, encourage, and support organ donation through public-facing educational outreach. We can inform potential recipients about donation, we can empower patients to seek out living donors, and with this funding we can increase living donation rates across the state of Oregon.

I encourage you to vote to pass HB 2622. Twenty-four states have already passed similar measures generating significant dollars for donation and transplantation awareness. It's time that we join these states! Thank you once again for your time, and I urge you to vote yes on HB 2622

Nicole Andergard

Living Kidney Donor and Donate Life NW Volunteer