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Dear Chair Barker and members of the House Committee on Business and Labor,

I am writing in support of SB 796, relating to benefit protection for living organ donors.

In February, 2009 my late husband, Rex, and I learned that as a result of diabetes his kidneys were failing. Almost exactly a year later, March 1, 2010, I donated a kidney to him. We had more than 6 good years that would simply not have been possible without a living donation from me: He would not have lived long enough to get a deceased donor kidney because of his many other health conditions.

Throughout the year before our surgeries, we spent many hours at the Legacy Kidney Transplant Center and came to realize how fortunate we were. We met so many people who had to wait for years – constantly wondering when they might hear that someone had died so they could live. It was, to say the least, sobering.

I strongly support any efforts made by Donate Life to expand the number of living donors through its relatively recent and excellent Erase the Wait initiative. Living donations are better for the recipients in many ways: They can plan when the surgery will occur, there is no time lost between when the kidney is removed and when it is transplanted, and all the tests can be done well in advance. All the research shows that living donations are superior. And we already know that kidney transplants not only save lives, they are less costly than years of dialysis.

SB 796 will, I believe, encourage more Oregonians to become living donors by ensuring that they will not be adversely penalized in their jobs or their insurance coverage for being generous.

My husband and I, and now I, never missed an opportunity to let people know that I donated a kidney – not to brag but to make sure people understand that being a donor is not that difficult and is, in fact, very rewarding. In my case, because I was already retired and on Medicare, I did not have to worry about work or health insurance. Although I only stayed in the hospital for 2 nights, I could not drive for a full six weeks and for that time also had to limit certain strenuous activities. If I were working, that would have imposed a serious constraint. As I said, no one should be punished for saving someone else's life.

A bit about me: I have a doctorate in public policy. Among other jobs, I was the director of Medicaid in New Mexico for about 2 years and then head of Health Planning for the state as well. As a result, I bring both my personal and my professional experiences to bear when I say that I strongly support SB 796.

Thank you for your attention to this important bill that will, I believe, save many Oregonians' lives.