

SB 230 Re: Organ donation non-discrimination

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee, my name is Jessica Lee and I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill 2303, which provides protections against discrimination of organ transplants for individuals with disabilities.

The National Center for Disabilities, an independent Federal Agency, reported that 44% of organ transplant centers self-reported that they would not add a child with some level of neurodevelopmental disability to the organ transplant list. Eighty-five percent reported that they would consider the disability as a factor in deciding whether or not to place an individual on the transplant list.

Around the world, Down syndrome, for example, is viewed far different from here in the United States. For anyone that has had the opportunity to experience a friend with Down syndrome, you know they are pure sunshine. Unfortunately, in many Scandinavian countries, very few babies are born with Down syndrome. In Iceland, only 2-3 babies are born each year. After positive pre-natal testing the pregnancies are terminated. With an increasing number of foreign medical professionals in the United States, it is important that we ensure lifesaving treatments are not denied as an option, based on certain diagnoses.

Volunteering at the North Dakota Special Olympics has afforded me the opportunity to meet some of the strongest, bravest and happiest people on earth. I'll never forget the day I met Gail. She was excited about her competition and got even more excited to learn I worked in Politics. "You must know my brother, TERRY WANZEK!" I smiled and said, "of course, everyone knows Senator Wanzek!" We hugged and took a picture.

Almost a year and a half ago, a friend through CrossFit, Annalise Duffy, whom you'll meet shortly, held a special workout as a fundraiser for a family she met through her network that had lost a baby who desperately needed a transplant, but was denied. I knew if there was anything we could do to prevent a similar situation in North Dakota, Senator Wanzek would be our champion. Of course, without hesitation, he agreed and we'd like to thank both he and Gail for their great work on this bill.

Absent federal legislation, which has been introduced led by Senator Marco Rubio, states are enacting their own non-discrimination laws. North Dakota has the opportunity to join the 34 states that have already provided protection for these great Americans. Thank you all for your service to our state and I hope you will consider a do-pass recommendation for Senate Bill 2302.

Thank you,

Jessica Lee

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