

# Saving More Lives through Organ Donation

## New Illinois law estimated to add 350,000 more to donation registry

The new year brings new hope to the 4,700 people in Illinois waiting for an organ transplant. Now 16 and 17 year olds in the state can register to be organ donors - provided they have parental consent.

Allison Wallace, a hospital development coordinator for the Gift of Hope, an Illinois organ and tissue donation service - says the new law could add 350,000 persons to the state's potential donor base and could possibly stem the growing number of Illinoisans waiting for organ and tissue donations. A number, she says, that has doubled in the past decade.

She does caution, however, that 16 and 17 year olds need to do their homework on what it means to be an organ donor and, of course, discuss the decision with their parents - who need to sign off on the commitment.

*"Being knowledgeable, owning that decision, really looking at things in a non-threatening, talkative environment," says Allison Wallace, hospital development coordinator for Gift of Hope. "And then, also discussing that with your family. That's the other huge part of that - is making the decision for yourself, but then also letting your family know what that decision is."*

Gregory Taylor, of Rockford, IL, has a new heart and liver thanks to a donor. He attributes the collaboration among OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center, its affiliation with the Mayo Clinic and the Gift of Hope for providing him a second chance at life seven years ago.

And though he's happy having his new organs, he's admits to some sadness over the fact another person had to die to make it happen.

*"I didn't know it at the time, but was a young man, probably in his 20's," says Gregory Taylor, an organ transplant recipient. "I figured, you know, I'm - I was in my 40's, late 40's. No, I didn't want to leave my family, but I'd lived a good life."*

Taylor believes the new law will make a difference. As a track and field coach at Guilford High School, in Rockford and working with Rockford Park District youth programs, his experience has provided him the opportunity to talk about organ donation with his athletes.

*"Some of them were 17, 16, 17 and some of them were 18," says Taylor. "And those who had gone and gotten their license said they did do it. They signed up to be organ donors. So, I mean, that - they felt good about doing it and the others were like, I'm going to do it when I'm able to."*

Communication is the key, says Gift of Hope's Wallace. Part of that is dismissing many of the myths about organ donation, such as the withholding of medical care so a patients organs can be harvested. Many of those discussions happen in a hospital setting.

*"In working with our hospital partners, here at OSF, you know, it's always very important to staff that something good comes from something so tragic," says Wallace. "So, if we can make that happen for families. I mean, I truly believe the work that we do helps our donor families just as much as it helps our transplant recipients."*

Wallace says the new law provides Gift of Hope the opportunity to expand their outreach efforts, like doing presentations to high school students.

For more information on organ donation visit [www.giftofhope.org](http://www.giftofhope.org)