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Jesse White's Legislation to Expand the Organ/Tissue Donor Registry Passes House Committee

Secretary of State Jesse White's legislation that would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to register for the state's First Person Consent Organ/Tissue Donor Registry when they receive their driver's license or identification card passed the House Transportation: Vehicles & Safety Committee unanimously.

House Bill 1805, sponsored by state Rep. Deb Conroy (D-Villa Park), now goes to the full House for consideration. A similar measure – Senate Bill 868, sponsored by state Sen. Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago) – passed a Senate Committee last week.

“Our goal is always to save lives,” White said. “Thousands of Illinoisans are waiting for an organ. Many of those who wait are someone's mother, father, daughter or son. This legislation, which the vast majority of other states have implemented, is an important step in reducing the number of those on the waiting list.”

The legislation amends the Illinois Anatomical Gift Act allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to join the First Person Consent Organ/Tissue Donor Registry. Under current law, an individual must be at least 18 years old to join the registry. Those who join the registry will receive a letter from the Secretary of State's office thanking them for joining. White encourages 16- and 17-year-olds to use this letter as a basis for discussing their decision with their parents.

By joining the First Person Consent Organ/Tissue Donor Registry, 16- and 17-year-olds will be giving consent to donate their organs and tissue at the time of their death, with a single limitation. The procurement organizations, Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Network and Mid-America Transplant, must make a reasonable effort to contact a parent or guardian to ensure that they approve of the donation. The parent or guardian will have the opportunity to overturn the child's decision. Once the 16- or 17-year-old turns 18, his/her decision would be considered legally binding without limitation.

There are 47 states that have enacted this legislation including Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, New York, North Carolina and Wisconsin.

In 2016, 121,553 16-year-olds and 132,852 17-year-olds were issued driver's licenses as well as 41,250 16-year-olds and 54,362 17-year-olds were issued identification cards.

Approximately 4,700 people are on the waiting list and about 300 people die each year waiting for an organ transplant. One person can improve the quality of life for up to 25 people. Currently, 6.1 million Illinoisans are registered with the state's registry.

Illinoisans can register with the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor Registry at LifeGoesOn.com, by calling 1-800-210-2106 or visiting their local Driver Services facility.