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Governor Signs History-Making Organ and Tissue Donor Bill

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SACRAMENTO, Calif., Oct. 11 /PRNewswire/ -- In a history-making move, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law Senate Bill 689 -- legislation designed to save tens of thousands of lives by calling on the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to partner with the new Donate Life California Organ and Tissue Donor Registry*.

Under the new law, the California DMV will begin on July 1, 2006 to capture donor decisions of licensed drivers on new and renewal license applications, and will electronically share that information with the Donate Life California Registry. Registrants will also be able to make a voluntary contribution of \$2.00 or more to the registry and public education about donation.

"Never before has the state of California had a registry system accessible to all," said Jackie Speier, (D-San Francisco/San Mateo), author of the legislation. "By partnering with the DMV, the Donate Life California Registry will provide all 23 million licensed drivers with the opportunity to give life through organ and tissue donation. This law potentially boosts the ranks of those committed to donate life from the tens of thousands to the millions."

Sen. Speier, members of Donate Life California, local government, and transplant candidates will participate in a press conference on this historic legislation at 10 am on Thurs., Oct. 13, at the State Building, 455 Golden Gate Ave. in San Francisco.

Until the law takes effect next July, the Donate Life California Registry will continue to be available only online at www.donateLIFeCalifornia.org or in Spanish at www.doneVIDAcalifornia.org.

Tracy Bryan, president of the non-profit Donate Life California, points out the new law provides needed hope to the thousands of Californians waiting for a life-saving transplant. "The DMV partnership provides all California residents the chance to give life," says Bryan. "It's been proven again and again that the key to a successful donor registry is accessibility -- and accessibility is best provided by the DMV. In fact, of the 40 states with donor registries, most are connected with the DMV, and of these about 98% of their signups come from the DMV while 2% register online."

In fact, signups go up significantly in states where the DMV is linked to a registry. For example, in New Jersey it took five years to register 50,000 people, but registrants tripled in just six months once the DMV was authorized to collect donor information.

California has followed that trend. Since the online Donate Life California Registry launched amid much publicity in April 2005, more than 140,000 Californians have signed up to give life. While that number is double what registry personnel had expected, it still just represents less than one percent of the 23 million licensed drivers in California.

"With Senate Bill 689 signed into law, it literally breathes new life into the donor registry," says Phyllis Weber, CEO of California Transplant Donor Network in Oakland. "It takes the

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window of opportunity to save lives, currently provided by the online registry -- and pushes the door wide open. The partnership with the DMV means we can go from saving hundreds more Californians a year to thousands."

Currently in California, nearly 19,000 people wait for a life-saving transplant -- 21% of the nation's total of nearly 90,000 transplant candidates. Tragically, one-third of those waiting will die waiting due to a lack of donors. The numbers demonstrate the need to better identify those willing to give life. A successful donor registry, under SB 689, will positively impact California and the nation as a whole -- saving lives and greatly cutting the cost of caring for people with end stage organ failure.

With the Donate Life California Registry, each registrant's personal donation decision is stored in a secure database free of charge, and the information is accessible as "read-only" to authorized, non-hospital organ and tissue recovery personnel. Signing up on the registry acts as an advanced directive for organ and tissue donation, and does not require the consent of any other person. Each registrant has the potential to save up to eight lives through organ donation and enhance another 50 lives through tissue donation.

The Donate Life California Registry, which can be found online at www.donateLIFeCalifornia.org or in Spanish at www.doneVIDAcalifornia.org, offers visitors the opportunity to sign up to give life, as well as current data and information about donation, personal stories that reinforce the life-enhancing result of organ and tissue gifts, and links to local resources.

*A statewide registry was first authorized in California in 2001 through SB 108 (Speier). Two years later, SB 112 (Speier) amended the law by transferring responsibility for a registry to the state's four federally-designated organ procurement organizations (OPOs) who make up Donate Life California: California Transplant Donor Network, serving Northern and Central California; Golden State Donor Services, serving the Sacramento metro area; Lifesharing, serving San Diego and Imperial counties; and OneLegacy, serving the seven counties around Los Angeles. California joins 40 other states in offering this service.

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Web site: <http://www.donateLIFeCalifornia.org>/<http://www.doneVIDAcalifornia.org/>

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