

**FOR RELEASE TO EDITORIAL PAGE WRITERS – September 26, 2005**

Following is an opinion-editorial written by Reg Green, a resident of La Canada, Calif.; Green is an author, donor father, and internationally respected speaker for organ donation. He has written this piece in concert with the potential signing into law of SB 689 (Speier) that would allow the California DMV to begin partnering July 1, 2006, with the state's online organ and tissue donor registry that began operating this past April. Under SB 689, the DMV would capture the donor decisions of licensed on new and renewal license applications, and would electronically share that information with the registry. Registrants would also be able to make a voluntary contribution of \$2.00 or more to the registry and donor public education.

**We would appreciate your giving this material your consideration for publication as the Governor is likely to make his decision to sign or veto this bill by October 9.**

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**Only the DMV Can Dramatically Raise Organ Donor Registration**

Eleven years ago my seven year-old son, Nicholas, was shot in Italy during a robbery while we were on a family vacation there. My wife, Maggie, and I donated his organs to seven Italians, four of them teenagers and two others, the parents of young children. Without a transplant most, if not all of them, would be dead and two others blind. As it is, all seven are living productive lives.

To us Nicholas was a magical little creature, who always wanted to do his best. When you were with him, you always wanted to do your best too. When he died I remember thinking "how am I going to get through the rest of my life without him?" And now life for me has a streak of loneliness it never had before.

But Maggie and I have never had a moment's regret about the decision we took. Donated organs are scarce almost everywhere in the world. In this country alone every day 17 people, many of them painfully young, die on the waiting list. A bill now before Governor Schwarzenegger, SB 689, which was passed unanimously by both houses, aims to reduce that heartbreaking waste of life.

Over the years, the way most Californians made their desire to donate known was by putting the familiar pink dot on their driver's license. Few realized the information was not sent to any central registry so that, if they suffered brain death, their families often had no idea what they had decided. At a bewildering time like that, few want to search for a wallet or purse.

Since March, because of an earlier bill, Californians have been able to put their names on a registry. That information is available to the family if death occurs. In that time a gratifying 140,000 have signed up.

The registry has a fatal weakness, however: people can sign up only through the Internet. That condemns it to being a sideshow. In other states with the same online-only system, only around 2 percent register.

In states where the DMV captures drivers' donation decisions, however, and enters them on the registry, the percentage rates often approach 80 percent. That could take participation in California to more than 18 million.

This is not just theoretical. Forty other states already have registries, most of them linked to the DMV. In those cases 98 percent of the registrations come via the DMV.

The reason why families need to think in advance about so daunting a subject is clear. Brain death is usually sudden death – a road accident, violence, a stroke. The family arrives at the hospital to find someone they love, who was in perfect health a few hours earlier, is dead or dying.

A wife may have to call her husband at work to say their child has been killed going to school. A father may have to tell his children their mother is not coming home.

For many people, numb with shock and fear, making a major decision there and then about something they have never thought of before is too much. They say no and often regret it for the rest of their lives.

An effective registry doesn't take away the pain but it allows them to make their decision calmly while death is just a distant concept. On average a decision to donate saves three or four other families just like their own from devastation. Most people will never again have as much opportunity to make the world a better place as they have at that moment. The Governor can help give them that opportunity by signing this important bill.

*For more information on the California registry please see [www.donateLIFECalifornia.org](http://www.donateLIFECalifornia.org) or, for Spanish speakers, [www.doneVIDACalifornia.org](http://www.doneVIDACalifornia.org). The Green family's website is [www.nicholasgreen.org](http://www.nicholasgreen.org)*