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Jesse White Unveils New Organ/Tissue Donation Campaign Featuring Donor Advocate Who Died Waiting for a Kidney

Secretary of State Jesse White urged all Illinoisans to join the state's Organ/Tissue Donor Registry following the unveiling of a new ad campaign featuring Vikki Tulcus, a long-time donor advocate who died waiting for a kidney.

"This campaign shows that many people, including co-workers, friends and family, never receive their gift of life due to the shortage of organs," White said. "Vikki had worked as an advocate for the organ/tissue donor program for nearly 10 years, helping donor and recipient families as well as those who were waiting for transplants, yet her transplant never came. In the end, Vikki herself became a donor, donating her corneas so that two others now can see."

In the ad, Vikki, who worked for the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor program, says, "Restoring your life as you knew it is the biggest gift you can get. You just don't even realize how lucky you guys all are to have a normal life."

The press conference was held at the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago, where Secretary White was joined by Vikki's family as well as donor and recipient families.

Currently, there are more than 5.2 million people registered to become organ/tissue donors in Illinois. However, more than 300 people die each year waiting for an organ transplant and about 5,000 are on the waiting list.

April is National Donate Life Month. White will attend events throughout Illinois to encourage donation. Organizations will be working together to promote donor awareness throughout the state. Libraries are distributing organ/tissue donor materials and hosting donor drives. Health fairs, schools, universities and hospitals will also be hosting donor drives and featuring displays statewide. Television and radio ads will air statewide throughout the month in English and Spanish. The ad will also be played on approximately 650 movie screens across the state.

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

Donate Life Illinois partners include the American Liver Foundation-Illinois, Biological Resource Center of Illinois; Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network; Heartland Lions Eye Bank; Illinois Eye-Bank; Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program; LifeSource; Mid-America Transplant Services; Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation; Rock River Valley Blood Center; National Kidney Foundation of Illinois and the National Marrow Donor Program.