

# Life Goes On

Secretary of State Jesse White • Winter 2021

*A newsletter for Secretary of State facility employees and other organ/tissue donation advocates*

As we begin a new year, we have the opportunity to reflect on what we are grateful for. While 2020 has certainly been a year of challenges, the Organ/Tissue Donor Program has continued to thrive. Many events, which were celebrated in person in the past, were redesigned to reach people virtually. National Minority Donor Awareness Month and National Donor Sabbath initiatives were developed virtually and posted on the Life Goes On website. The program received positive feedback on both virtual campaigns from the public and within our office.

Registry numbers have continued to grow despite the pandemic. My office has been able to continue to serve the people of Illinois. Despite periodic facility closings, the donor registry has climbed to more than 7 million registrants.

My office has been blessed with dedicated, hardworking employees. Thank you all for your commitment to being the best we can be. I know that the thousands of individuals and families who wait for transplants appreciate the continued efforts of staff to register more people. Keep up the hard work as we move forward in 2021.

## Secretary White wins prestigious 2020 James S. Wolf, M.D. Courage Award

Donate Life America (DLA) bestowed its top award, the James S. Wolf, M.D. Courage Award, to Secretary White in October 2020. The award is named in honor of the transplant surgeon pioneer who founded the Coalition on Donation (now Donate Life America). The award is presented annually to an individual who has played a significant role in the community to advance public awareness about the benefits of organ/tissue donation. Secretary White has been professionally and personally committed to donation for many years, participating in countless donor events reaching large audiences with his advocacy of this important mission. His commitment to increasing the Illinois Donor Registry culminated in the registry reaching 7 million registrants last year. Secretary White's late sister received a kidney many years ago, which enabled her to live an additional 27 years. This lifesaving gift to his sister helped propel his interest in promoting donation throughout his administration.



*Jesse White*

Jesse White  
Secretary of State



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## Donor program partners with many departments within SOS office



The Organ/Tissue Donor Program partners with many departments within the Secretary of State's office to make its initiatives successful. The collaboration the donor program has forged with many internal departments has allowed the program to reach more people and accomplish its goals, especially during the pandemic.

The program has partnered with the **Driver Services Department** for many years to promote donation. Donor program regional coordinators routinely visit Driver Services facilities several times a year, answering any questions employees may have about donation. The coordinators are also provided donor awareness wristbands and pens to distribute to employees so they can show their support for donation.

One of the program's most successful partnerships is a facility tour with Secretary White every April for National Blue and Green Day. These tours promote donor awareness, and Secretary White presents countertop displays of local residents with their donor stories to the facilities. Facility staff show tremendous support and enthusiasm decorating facilities in blue and green colors to welcome Secretary White and honor donor families. Facility managers also work with regional coordinators to set up new employee training sessions. In 2021, donor program coordinators will be partnering with facilities again by having employees watch a short donor-training presentation and providing them with new Life Goes On polo shirts.

The donor program also collaborates with the **Communications Department** on many joint initiatives that are distributed to the public or posted to the Life Goes On website. Each year, we partner with the Communications Department to create a number of awareness campaigns. In August 2020, the donor program worked closely with the department (press office, print and website designers) to launch the program's first virtual Wave Away the Waiting initiative for National Minority Donor Awareness Month. The annual event, traditionally an in-person awareness event held in Chicago, pivoted to a virtual web campaign in 2020, complete with a letter and video message from Secretary White, facts on minority donor awareness, an educational PowerPoint presentation and supporting materials for individuals to download to promote minority donor awareness in their communities. In addition to the virtual campaign being available on the website, it was distributed to numerous health departments, community groups, minority organizations, college campuses and student groups throughout Illinois, as well as our Donate Life Illinois partners. For National Donor Sabbath – Nov. 13-15, 2020 – donor program

coordinators developed a second virtual, web-based campaign through the Communications Department that was made available on the Life Goes On website for religious leaders. The materials included a letter and video message from Secretary White, a National Donor Sabbath public service announcement, worship service and sermon ideas, and suggested scriptures, in addition to a list of religious views on donation. The collaboration of the donor program and the Communications Department enabled the successful creation and distribution of these web-based virtual campaigns. In addition, the Communications Department also produces the donor program's marketing brochures, Life Goes On quarterly newsletter and public service announcements.

The **Information Technology Department (IT)** has provided technical support to help the Organ/Tissue Donor Program's virtual programs. The department also overhauled the computer systems to generate the program's 16- and 17-year-old statistics. In addition, it created an access registry to assist in facilitating transplantations. The partnership with IT is critical to keeping the donor program's requests for supporting technology current.

The Organ/Tissue Donor Program relies on the **Budget Department** to meet its short- and long-term goals. In such uncertain times, the Budget Department continues to play a critical role in ensuring funding for short- and long-term goals, whether the need is for marketing and promotional supplies or television and radio public service announcements.

The donor program works with the **Police Inquiry Unit (PIU)** which governs and protects the donor registry. The unit – a division within the **Secretary of State's Police Department** – ensures the confidentiality and integrity of the registry 24/7. The unit handles inquiries from organ procurement organizations across the nation and ensures that donation occurs in a timely manner. It is a unique integration within the Secretary of State's Organ Donor Program.

The **Legislative Department** is another integral part of the donor program's success. The Legislative Department monitors bills and potential legislation, which may affect the program, as well as helping pass legislation that relates to the Organ/Tissue Donor Program.

The role of our **General Counsel's Office** is vast and fundamental. They are intrinsically involved and knowledgeable about legal matters within the department. With relation to the Organ/Tissue Donor Program, the legal department advises at the executive and senior level aiding in interpretation of new and existing laws, contract agreements and legal rights. Their support is imperative to the success of our program and outreach initiatives.

The **Mailroom and Warehouse** are also an integral part of the donor program's success. The Mailroom ensures a variety of materials are sent in a timely manner. Numerous mailings are sent out each year. The Warehouse keeps the stock of stored donor program supplies – sending materials to facilities and other offices, as well as letting staff know when supplies need to be reordered.

Thank you to all of the Secretary of State departments that work in tandem with the donor program to make our lifesaving mission possible.

# National Donor Sabbath pivots to virtual campaign

Due to the pandemic, National Donor Sabbath – the annual weekend of religious observance for organ/tissue donation – pivoted to a virtual campaign in November. In past years, the donor program had always observed National Donor Sabbath with a press conference held by Secretary White, joined by religious leaders, to kick off the weekend of observance. Traditionally held two weekends before Thanksgiving, past observances also included Secretary White attending several church services in person, speaking to congregations about the importance of registering as an organ/tissue donor.

But during the weekend of Nov. 13-15, 2020, the observance looked a little different because of the pandemic. Organ/Tissue Donor Program staff created a virtual National Donor Sabbath campaign on its website for those interested in participating in the conversation. Individuals were encouraged to download the National Donor Sabbath materials from the Life Goes On website and to use the information and materials provided to start a conversation within their own faith communities.

"We recognize National Donor Sabbath in a virtual format, but the message remains the same: to raise organ and tissue donor awareness in faith communities," said Secretary White. "Many people buy into the myth that their religion does not support organ and tissue donation; however, most religions honor and respect organ donation as an act of generosity."

The National Donor Sabbath public service announcement (PSA) for 2020 featured Franciscan Sister Ritamary Brown of HSHS

St. Mary's Hospital in Decatur. She works with families who have lost a loved one and have been faced with making the donor decision.

"I have discovered that through faith, families find comfort, hope and closure by choosing organ donation during this dark time in their life," Sister Ritamary Brown said in the PSA. The annual November PSA was distributed to more than 100 radio stations throughout the state to call attention to the need for more donors in Illinois.

Other virtual National Donor Sabbath materials on the Life Goes On website included a letter from Secretary White asking religious leaders to include donation information in their weekly communications with followers (many of which are virtual now) and a personal video message from Secretary White asking religious leaders to speak for a few minutes about donation in their messages to their congregations.

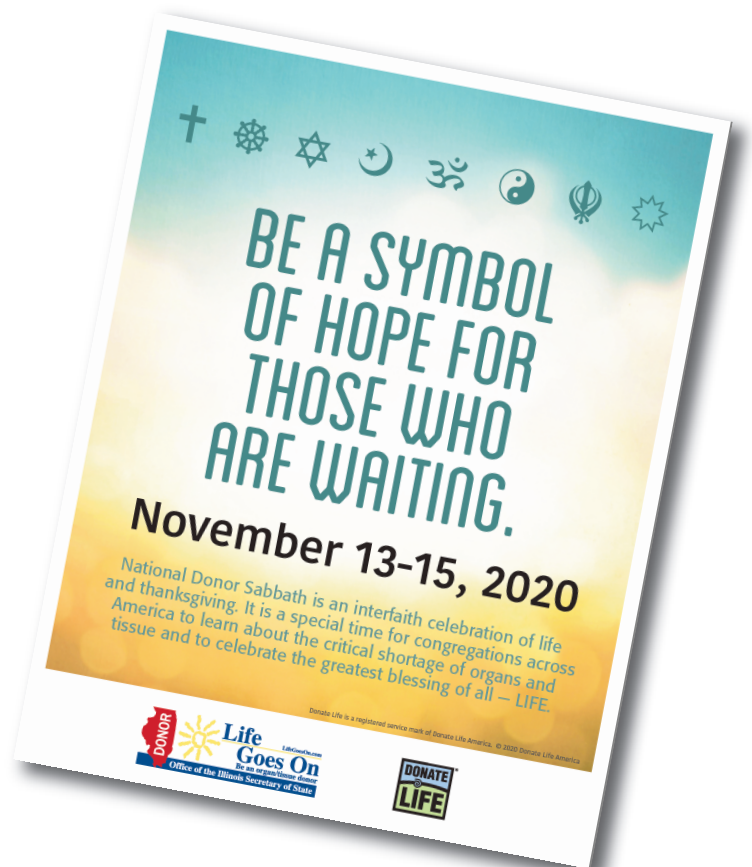
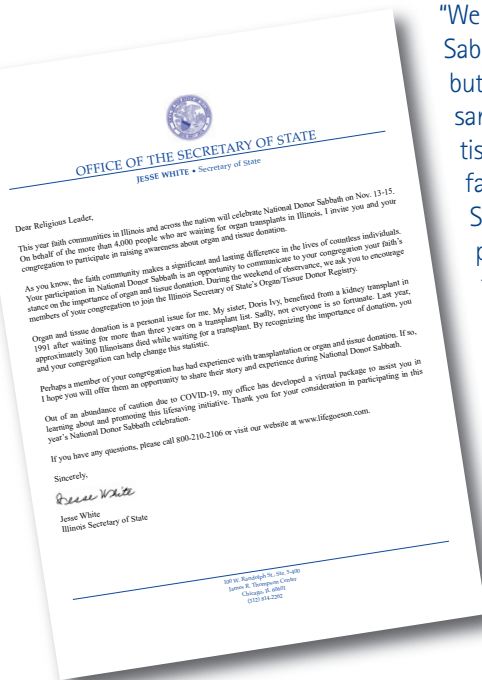
The virtual website packet also included a link to the Organ/Tissue Donor Registry, an article featuring numerous religious leaders' views on donation, and a press release about National Donor Sabbath and the new



Sister Ritamary Brown records the National Donor Sabbath public service announcement in October, which was distributed to radio stations throughout the state.

virtual campaign. The website also offered a list of religions that support donation including Catholicism, Protestantism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and more. In most religions, donation is not only accepted, it is considered a lifesaving humanitarian decision and is encouraged.

We asked religious leaders to download the provided sermon ideas and the suggested clergy activities, which included creating a donor designation day, speaking about donation in their message that weekend, recognizing transplant recipients within the congregation, and including donor education in health ministry messages.



## Where Are They Now?



Jonathan Bell

For Jonathan Bell, his seventh-grade year was one he navigated as an adult. A healthy child with athletic ability, Jonathan was surprised to suddenly become ill. Flu-like symptoms turned into a more dire situation when his mother, a nurse, took him to the doctor for a diagnosis. He was told he had dilated cardiomyopathy, an enlargement of his heart to two times its normal size. His family was told Jonathan needed a heart transplant at age 13. He had always been healthy and athletic so this diagnosis was a shock to his family, especially his mother.

Now 25, and a patrol officer for the DeKalb Police Department, Jonathan recalls that scary winter before his heart transplant. He became very ill and was hospitalized for six weeks before his transplant. He received his heart transplant on March 23, 2008, at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago. He returned home in the late spring of 2008 with his new heart. After his transplant, Jonathan returned to sports in eighth grade – football and track and field – much to his mother's dismay. He told his mother he did not want to be treated any differently after his transplant. He continued to compete in sports throughout high school, graduating from DeKalb High School in 2014.

Jonathan appeared in the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Program's April 2009 National Donate Life Month commercial that also featured other children who had also received transplants.

Jonathan said he did not think much about donation before his transplant, but now he often thinks about how a perfect stranger saved his life. "Do as much good as you can while you're on Earth," Jonathan said. "I feel it's a very important decision that everyone should make. Essentially, you're helping someone live on."

## February is National Heart Health Month

In February, we turn to thoughts of love, and what better way to show some love in these difficult times than to learn how to keep your heart healthy? A healthy heart ensures a long and healthy life, so take the opportunity to learn what can contribute to heart disease, which is the number one cause of death in this country. This is the 56th year of Heart Health Month, which was launched in 1964 by former President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had heart disease and suffered a near-fatal heart attack in 1955.

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), nearly a quarter of the deaths in the United States are caused by heart disease. The AHA also says that much of what contributes to heart disease is preventable, meaning there are steps to minimize your risk. The good news is you can make positive changes in your life by following a few simple steps. The association recommends making moderate physical activity part of your daily routine; improving your diet by eating fresh, unprocessed foods; maintaining a healthy weight; limiting excess salt and fat intake; quitting smoking; controlling blood sugar and cholesterol; treating high blood pressure; managing stress and anxiety; and getting regular physical checkups.



## 2021 Donor Program Staff List

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