

March 17, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

We are writing as a follow-up to our earlier communication Dec. 8, 2022.

The U.S. commercial aircraft industry is critical to the success of the nation's organ donation and transplant system. Each day, Americans awaiting a transplant will receive generous donor organs via commercial aircraft.

For these patients, the aviation system needs to work seamlessly. Airports, airlines and the air traffic control system are doing their best, but the government can do more to address long standing inefficiencies and critical failure points.

The undersigned commit to working with the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and are pleased to offer several common-sense ideas for your consideration. In fact, since our previous communication, United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) staff have met with both Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and TSA representatives to discuss the issue, gather buy-in and offer potential solutions.

Before the September 11th attacks, organs typically flew in the cockpit or somewhere else nearby, under the watchful eye of the captain and crew, and were chaperoned to and from the gate by a transplant professional, usually from the local Organ Procurement Organization (OPO).

It's been said that September 11th changed everything and in the case of transporting organs, this is true. Since the attacks, unaccompanied organs have been relegated to the cargo hold below the wings with passenger luggage. OPO professionals are no longer allowed to accompany the organ to and from the aircraft because there is no ticketed passenger to navigate the security process and bring the organ to the passenger cabin.

Today, donor organs are handled by airport and airline personnel and treated as cargo. Congress has taken note--Senators and Representatives have shared stories of organs missing connections, airline employees misplacing organs, and cargo offices closing, making timely organ pick up impossible. While this is a rare occurrence thanks to the commitment of professionals on the ground, any lifesaving organ unable to be transplanted because of a transportation issue is a tragedy.

As uncommon as they are, these mistakes are completely avoidable. They are also heartbreakingly painful to the patient who is unable to receive the gift of life, and to the family of the selfless donor whose final act was organ donation.

Because airlines and airports have reported that we must come to separate agreements with *each* airline and airport to facilitate these basic reforms, we believe that intervention by the federal government is necessary to eliminate potential errors in the transport of donor organs via commercial flight.

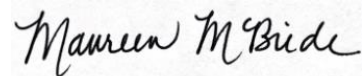
UNOS believes this issue can and should be addressed, and urges you to consider the following actions:

1. Update DOT regulations to streamline commercial transport of organs and use UNOS and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as a resource as you develop these rules. Regulations surrounding airport and aircraft security are at least 15 years old and are due for immediate reform. Updated regulations should again allow priceless organs to travel in the passenger cabin of an aircraft.
2. Allow an authorized professional to accompany the organ to the passenger cabin of an aircraft for the purpose of ensuring that the organ is safely embarked and disembarked off the aircraft. Adding priority for the donor organ and any authorized professional accompanying it to exit the plane prior to passengers disembarking to speed transport.
3. Require airlines and airports to coordinate with each other to facilitate the smooth transport of organs.
4. Require air traffic control to give priority takeoff and landing to flights with organs onboard.

UNOS is the mission-driven non-profit serving as the nation's organ donation and transplant system under contract with the federal government. We lead the network of transplant hospitals, OPOs and thousands of volunteers who are dedicated to honoring the gifts of life entrusted to us and to making lifesaving transplants possible for patients in need.

We pledge to be your partner in addressing these transportation issues and look forward to working with you toward our shared goal of ensuring the safe, efficient and equitable movement of organs through our commercial air system.

Sincerely yours,



Maureen McBride, Ph.D.
Interim Chief Executive Officer, United Network for Organ Sharing



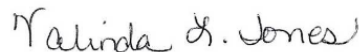
Jerry McCauley, MD, MPH
Chief, Division of Nephrology
Vice Chairman, Health Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University
President, United Network for Organ Sharing



Dianne LaPointe Rudow, ANP-BC, DNP, FAAN
Professor, Department of Population, Health Science and Policy
Director, Zweig Family Center for Living Donation Recanati/Miller Transplant Institute
The Mount Sinai Medical Center
Vice President, United Network for Organ Sharing



Matthew Cooper, MD, FACS
Chief, Division of Transplant Surgery, Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital
Director, Solid Organ Transplantation, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
Immediate Past President, United Network for Organ Sharing



Valinda L. Jones, MSN, RN
President and Consultant, Transplant Education Connection
Vice President of Patient and Donor Affairs, United Network for Organ Sharing

Cc:

Acting Administrator Billy Nolen
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, SW
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable David Pekoske
Administrator

Transportation Security Administration
6595 Springfield Center Drive
Springfield, VA 22150

Administrator Carole Johnson
Health Resources and Services Administration
Department of Health and Human Services
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20852