

June 19, 2023

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, & Transportation
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, & Transportation
United States Senate
167 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chair, U.S. House Committee on
Transportation & Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
1135 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on
Transportation & Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, Chair Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen:

As stakeholders in the organ donation and transplant community, we urge you to include in the next Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization a provision that would promote the efficient transportation of donated organs through our country's commercial aviation system. Specifically, we seek Congressional support for establishment of a federal process to enable the transportation of a donated organ in the passenger cabin instead of in a cargo hold of an airplane.

We represent the thousands of individuals waiting for a transplant as well as professionals who work in transplant hospitals, organ procurement organizations (OPOs), and other entities that are dedicated to honoring the gifts of life entrusted to us and to making lifesaving transplants possible for patients in need. We share a common mission: saving lives by equitably and efficiently getting as many donor organs as possible to the patients who need them.

Before the September 11 attacks, organs, primarily kidneys, were transported above wing under the watchful eye of the aircrew. The organ was delivered to the gate by a transplant professional, usually an employee of a local OPO. The attacks prompted protocol changes at airports. A transplant professional can no longer accompany the organ through security to and from the aircraft. As a result, organs are now transported by cargo. However, transporting organs through cargo involves more logistical planning which does not lend itself to the nature of organ transplantation, where time-limited organs must be transported at all hours of the day. For example, organs being transported by cargo often must be at the airport 60 to 120 minutes before departure. If an organ arrives at the airport after this cut off, the organ cannot be transported on that flight. Additionally, cargo offices have highly variable opening hours, and if an organ arrives at its destination, but the cargo office is closed, it cannot be collected by a courier. While not a common occurrence, logistical delays heighten the risk that an organ cannot be transplanted.

We urge the Committees to consider a legislative provision in the FAA reauthorization that would require the FAA to develop regulations to enable the safe and efficient delivery of human organs intended for transplant to the gate of a commercial airplane, and carriage of these organs securely within the passenger cabin.

Thank you for your efforts to strengthen our nation's organ donation and transplant system. We look forward to working with you towards our common goal of ensuring the safe, efficient, and equitable transport of organs by commercial airline travel.

Sincerely,

American Association of Kidney Patients
American Foundation for Donation & Transplantation
American Society of Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics
American Society of Nephrology
American Society of Transplantation
American Society of Transplant Surgeons
Association of Organ Procurement Organizations
Donate Life America
Donate Life Virginia
Kidney Care Partners
Kidney Transplant Collaborative
National Kidney Foundation
Nationwide Organ Recovery Transport Alliance
North American Transplant Coordinators Organization
Organ Donation Advocacy Group
Renal Physicians Association
Transplant Recipients International Organization
Transplant Families
Transplant Unwrapped
United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)
Waitlist Zero