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**For release after 3 p.m. 2/9/05**

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## **Organ donation saves nearly 1,000 lives in 2004** **Future increases projected under 'first person consent;' HB 1077 introduced**

ELMHURST, Ill. (February 9, 2005) – Organ donation in Illinois and northwest Indiana saved the lives of nearly 1,000 organ transplant recipients in 2004, surpassing a record-setting 300 organ donations from deceased donors for the second year in a row.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network announced today that 968 lifesaving organs were provided for transplant through its network in 2004. Gift of Hope's donation service area includes 183 hospitals and 11.3 million people in Illinois and northwest Indiana.

The transplants were made possible through the generous decisions of 303 families to consent to organ donation. That compares with 309 families who consented to donation in 2003 providing for 972 transplants. In 2003, Gift of Hope became only the third organ-procurement organization in the nation to work with more than 300 donors in a single year.

In addition, 874 families consented to tissue donation in 2004, enabling tens of thousands of patients to receive medical transplants of bone, heart valves and other tissues. Gift of Hope worked with the families of 872 tissue donors in 2003.

"We are proud of our successes providing so many transplant recipients a second chance at life," Gift of Hope President/CEO Jerry Anderson said. "We honor the compassion of the families we work with who consented to organ and tissue donation. We also commend the work of our colleagues at the transplant centers, hospitals, coroner's offices, funeral homes and so many others in our service area who work alongside us to make donation possible."

Sadly, despite these efforts, more than 250 Illinois men, women and children died in 2004 waiting for a transplant. Another person is added to the national transplant waiting list every 13 minutes – a list that now includes more than 87,000 people, including more than 4,500 in Illinois. Seventeen of these people will die each day waiting.

"Many of these deaths could be prevented if more potential donors would, in fact, become donors," Anderson said. One significant opportunity to ensure more potential donors actually donate – by ensuring their wishes are honored – has been introduced to the Illinois General Assembly for consideration

At a news conference today in Springfield, Gift of Hope joined legislators and state officials announcing introduction of HB 1077 to enact first-person consent in Illinois.

*(MORE)*

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First-person consent means an individual's signed donor card or enrollment in a state donor registry documents legally binding intent to donate and cannot be overridden by family members. Similar legislation has passed in 42 other states.

A legislated task force chaired by Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White recently submitted a report to the General Assembly recommending that Illinois implement first-person consent. Currently, consent from a potential donor's legal next-of-kin is required before donation can take place.

"In our donation service area, approximately 19 percent of potential donors enrolled as a 'yes' in the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry through Secretary White's office have their intent overruled by family members," said Anderson, a member of the first-person task force and immediate past chair of a national registry task force for the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations.

Carrying out those individual's wishes under first-person consent, he said, would result in an additional 30 organ donations each year in Illinois.

"First-person consent is a rare legislative opportunity to enact a change that will directly save lives," Anderson said. "In carrying out Illinoisans' declared wishes to become organ donors, we can provide about 100 additional organs for transplant each year. It means we have the opportunity to save 1,000 more lives in the next decade."

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network is the federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) responsible for coordinating organ and tissue donation in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Since its inception in 1986, Gift of Hope has coordinated donations that have saved the lives of more than 10,000 organ transplant recipients, and improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of tissue transplant recipients.

Organs and tissues from a single donor can help more than 25 individuals. Everyone, no matter how young or old, can be a lifesaver by choosing to be a donor. To become a donor, sign a Uniform Donor Card (such as the card on the back of a driver's license) and, most importantly, inform family members of the decision. In Illinois, a family's consent is required before donation can occur.

For more information on organ and tissue donation, contact Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network at 888/307-DON8 or [www.giftofhope.org](http://www.giftofhope.org).

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