



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

ILLINOIS SECRETARY OF STATE

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Secretary White Leads Organ Donor Week Activities

SPRINGFIELD — Secretary of State Jesse White today announced statewide activities scheduled for "Organ Donor Awareness Week " April 16-22. White will launch efforts to increase the number of participants in the state's organ donor program with a fly-around to four cities that have community-wide "Life Goes On" projects planned throughout the year.

"The tremendous need for organ donors cannot be stressed enough with 5,000 critically ill Illinois residents currently awaiting organ transplants," said White.

Events are planned in each of the four areas – Peoria, Bloomington/Normal, Champaign/Urbana and Carbondale.

In each of the "Life Goes On" cities, a committee of activists in the transplant field has been working to develop activities to increase community awareness and participation. "This program is special," said White, "because each group of people has put together projects that will work in their own area."

Appearing with White in each city will be an individual whose life has been profoundly impacted by the transplantation issue: two organ recipients, a member of a family who donated the organs of a loved one and the father of a child who died before a donor could be found.

As part of the Secretary of State's efforts, radio and television stations will be airing new ads featuring Secretary White and Connie Payton, widow of Chicago Bears' superstar Walter Payton, who died last year from liver disease. Payton's

emotional and honest treatment of his illness has been instrumental in raising the rate of individuals signing up for the organ donor program on their driver's licenses.

In addition, the Secretary of State's organ donor program is featured in a special edition of the Cubs 2000 baseball schedule which will be available at all driver's license facilities throughout the state.

Among the many activities sponsored by the Secretary of State's office to encourage organ donation is an annual poster contest for Illinois school children of all ages. The winners of this year's contest will be honored at a special presentation on Wednesday, April 19, at the Illinois State Library in Springfield. The awards will be presented at 1:30 p.m.

To support "Organ Donor Awareness Week" activities, the 7-11 corporation is placing canisters in Chicago area stores to raise funds for transplant needs.

Secretary White will give additional impetus to the week's events by appearing at a Chicago Cubs game on April 15th with his sister who is a kidney recipient, and throwing out the first ball at the Chicago White Sox game on April 22.

Although the Illinois' organ donor registry is the largest in the nation, thousands of Illinois residents who need transplants are unable to have life-saving transplants because of the shortage of donors.

"Over 5,000 people in Illinois are waiting right now," said Secretary White. "Nationally, more than 68,000 need organs to survive. Every 18 minutes, a new person is added to the waiting lists, and 12 people die every day because they didn't receive an organ in time." In Illinois, the waiting list increases about 20% each year.

White suggests that all residents check their driver's license to make sure that they are registered as potential donors. "If you are, be sure to discuss your feelings with your family," White said. "If you're not, call 1-800-210-2106 and we'll make sure that you're added."