

**Testimony of Linda D. Barrasse, MD, FACC, FACP**

**Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
House Majority Policy Committee Hearing - Organ Donation  
April 9, 2015**

Good morning Chairman Benninghoff and members of the Committee

My name is Linda Barrasse and I am a board certified cardiologist with a practice in Scranton. I speak to you today as an experienced medical professional and most importantly as a loving mother.

My precious son, Cody, died on April 7 of 2013 after sustaining a head injury. He was hit by a car as a pedestrian. He was 22 years old. Nine of his organs went to 7 different people. He gave the ultimate act of charity. And that, my friends, was his destiny. He was a hero until his final breath. I will be forever proud and will proclaim it until I take my last breath.

I know the power of donation.

An 18 month old baby received the small part of his liver ...

A middle aged woman, the larger piece ...

A nine year old boy received his beautiful heart ...

A 12 year old boy his pancreas and kidney ...

Another woman his other kidney ...

And a man from outside Pittsburgh now breathes with both of Cody's lungs ...

One cornea and lots of skin were also donated.

As a practicing cardiologist, there have been many times during my own career that I have worked hard to save my patients lives. Let me be clear - it is only after our efforts to save our patient have proven futile that a determination of death will be made. And the determination of death is made according to established medical standards - it IS NOT some mystery criteria. Any suggestion otherwise is just wrong.

When the brain has stopped all function or the heart has stopped all function a person is dead. I know this first hand, as a physician and as a mother. Only after a determination has been made that a patient's death is imminent and the family has been informed of this does the option of donation arise.

I have cared for patients who became donors.

Someone was going to live because someone else died ...

We don't like to think about those things, let alone talk about them.

The decision for us was not hard.

There was no one in the world tougher than Cody ...

There was no one in the world who was truer to himself than Cody ...

There was no one in the world who had our backs like Cody ...

I knew he would give himself to another without thinking twice. Cody could not be saved ...  
But others could ...

Cody lives on. That gives me joy. It soothes my aching soul. As a wise man told me a few weeks after Cody died. Cody lived a "Perfect Life".

He never grew old. Never had chronic disease. Never became demented. He loved and was loved. He was educated, and was accepted to 7 Law Schools. And, above all, was completely comfortable in his own skin. Even in his death, he had no suffering. He gave the Ultimate Gift... HIMSELF.

The concept of "the Perfect Life" may not translate into perfection for us who love and miss him, but what he has left us is nothing less than a miracle.

Today that mother of that 9 year old boy has her son.  
She will see him run again; go to school; drive a car; have a date; drink a beer ... all the things I got to do ... all because of my son.

When we arrived in Pittsburgh, it was very clear that Cody could not survive his injuries.

As the hours passed, we knew our time with Cody was coming close to an end. We knew everything that could be done for Cody had been done. In the early hours of April 7th his breathing changed... he lost all of his primitive reflexes....

The physicians examined him and at 4:46 that morning his brain stopped working.

Cody's heart and lungs and other precious life-saving gifts could be donated....  
As we left Pittsburgh, I kept wondering who would be the lucky people to get a piece of my son...

Who were they?

What were they like?

What would they become??

Well, until recently, I could only imagine what they were like. I wrote letters letting all the recipients know how happy I was knowing that my son lived on through them. I made it clear how very much I wanted to meet them.

Then in May, we met the man who now breathes with Cody's lungs. He and his family had the courage to meet us at the annual memorial service held at CORE. The emotion was intense ... like no other I have ever had. We continue to communicate and I am sure will continue to be part of each other's lives.

Just a few weeks ago, we received a powerful letter from a very loving Grandmother. Her cherished granddaughter received the small piece of Cody's liver. She was 18 months old at

the time. She turned 3 on Oct 11. Her remarkable Grandmother wrote her story. And hopefully we will be meeting Jazzy and her family soon. I cannot wait to get my arms around her.

And just 5 days ago, I received a third letter ... this time from the woman who now lives because she received the larger piece of Cody's liver. My hope is that we will meet her soon too.

My real dream is that someday I can get all of the recipients to my home and throw them a big party ... I want them to see where Cody was raised and to meet his family and friends....

Maybe someday.

The whole donation experience was respectful and even reverent.

The nurses were magnificent. Within hours over 40 of Cody's friends found their way to Pittsburgh. Those very busy nurses made it possible that each and every one of them had some time with Cody and was able to say goodbye.

The doctors were beyond professional. A call like that neurosurgical resident had to make was a doctor's nightmare. The medical and surgical physicians who selflessly cared for my son made me proud to be a doctor. I can never repay them for their genuine kindness, compassion, and absolute professionalism.

Then there was Jen ... the woman who coordinated Cody's donation of his gifts. Her gracefulness and dedication, to not just her profession but to us, simply could not be duplicated. She has a piece of my soul that belongs to no one else. We had all of the support we could have asked for.

It has been told to me that the OR staff prayed as the recovery began. A greater gift they could not give me.

Although thank you is not enough, it is absolutely necessary right now to express my deepest thanks to all of you.....

Those who may have cared for Cody ... and those of you who have cared for others like him...

We should be proud of the work of our organ procurement professionals .....  
What they do quietly, but so profoundly helps so many....

SO why do I tell you this story?  
Because I want you to think of Cody and all the others who have been cared for... And if you should ever be in the situation that I was... remember my son and his Gift of Life...  
Because I want you to think of the 7 people whose lives are changed because of my son ...  
Because I want you to think about talking to your own family members about your wishes ...

Don't be afraid; don't avoid the issue. I support education about donation because as you know, when it happens, decisions need to be made quickly.

When you think about my son ... SMILE ... and remember The Perfect Life ... and know Cody lives on, just as hundreds of others that you have cared for.

And when you think of me, know how grateful I am for the privilege of being the mother of two magnificent sons. My biggest worry as Cody's mother is that people might forget who he was. It is moments like this that help me know that this will not happen

I have been told, "Linda, you are so strong." No, my friends, it is not strength. The driving force is Pure Love. My love for my sons trumps any and all hurt and emptiness that I might have. No force is stronger than Love.

Today I hope you can leave here knowing how important organ donation is to my family and donor families. There is never a day that our hearts do not suffer ... knowing that someone will have to die for someone else to live

My own pain will never vanish ... don't believe those people who say otherwise. There is no substitute for the absence of the one we have lost.

But I intend on proclaiming the goodness and courage of who my son was ... and I hope you do the same by understanding the power of donation and transplantation. I know that this very special field of medicine is governed by many laws and standards. Because so many people are in need. And I know that donation and transplantation can only happen when individuals and families are given the opportunity to help others.

Please know of my profound gratitude that Cody was able to save so many other families.