

Would-be organ donors urged to register anew

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Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White threw out the first pitch Thursday at the White Sox game. He also pitched one of his favorite causes -- getting state residents to sign up as organ donors as part of Organ Donor Day at the ballpark.

More than 4,700 Illinois residents are awaiting lifesaving organ transplants, according to Donate Life Illinois. And their plight has been compounded by the fact that 20 percent of donor organs have been lost due to conflicting wishes of family members.

In an effort to avoid such losses, Illinois passed a First-Person Consent Law more than a year ago, which makes a donor's decision final.

Illinois has a split system with 6 million people in an old organ donor registry and 2 million in a new registry. One problem is the old registry still allows donor families to dispute final decisions.

The challenge is to help people understand they have to re-register to ensure that their decision is final, said Kim McCullough, spokeswoman for Gift of Hope, an organ and tissue donor network in Illinois.

The new registrations are preferable because the process becomes a contract between the individual and the state, said David Druker, the secretary of state's press secretary.

Families of deceased are grieving and busy with funeral arrangements, Drucker said.

"(This decision) is the last thing on their minds, and it's very unpleasant to deal with it," he said.

More than 40 states have similar legislation in place, and McCullough thinks it was a long time coming to this state.

"People don't want to put their families in the position of making that decision," she said.

"Illinois makes it easier than any other state for people to sign up to donate organs," McCullough said. "People can sign up online, at the Department of Motor Vehicles, at donor registration events and by phone."