



# LAWLER & GOTTHEIMER TALK ABOUT ORGAN TRANSPLANT LAW

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/Investigative Reporter



Among the many ways doctors save lives is through organ transplants. Unfortunately, there are more people waiting to get a new organ than there are organs out there for transplant. One person Lauren Shields, who was an 8-year-old heart transplant recipient led a crusade to get people to see the importance of being an organ donor. Congressmen Mike Lawler (R-NY 17) and Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ 05) led this crusade in the House OF Representatives to get [\*Lauren Shields Organ Donation Act\*](#), legislation that honors the legacy of Lauren Shields of Stony Point, New York. This new law would make it easier to get on the organ donor lists.

After receiving a life-saving heart transplant as a child, Lauren dedicated her life to encouraging others to become organ donors, helping lead to the passage of Lauren's Law in New York in 2012. Lauren passed away on June 26, 2026, at the age of 26, leaving behind a lasting legacy of advocacy and service. The legislation builds on her work by making organ donor registration more accessible to Americans nationwide.

Lawler and Gottheimer held a press conference at the Westchester Medical Center (WMC) in Valhalla on October 22, 2026, to discuss this act.

A number of people spoke at this event. You will see and hear their words in their voice over my written explanation of their statements on this most important matter.

While waiting for Lawler and Gottheimer to arrive, one of the administrators at WMC gave a little speech about what is involved in organ transplanting.

<https://youtu.be/iJc3z3dd2DM>

The doctor said they had a couple of big announcements to make hopefully in the next 4 weeks because they have great talent here, but they're also searching for better talent, and this is not like a pipe dream that will improve the quality of transplant work being done at WMC.

"I will say that Don Steigman, our system COO in the back there who was the system COO at Jackson, Health when I was at the University of Miami, were kind of like New York Medical College and WMC, like two sides of the same piece of paper. We put together the Miami Transplant Institute, which became the busiest, it was not the busiest or the best, to be quite honest with you, when I got there, many years ago, and, under Don's leadership, put together the busiest liver transplant program in the world or in the country, but certainly in the country.

It really elevated the quality and number of transplants that were available throughout Florida and so we're hoping to replicate that success here and the person that we think will be coming to lead the transplant institute actually was referred to us by the head of the Miami Transplant Institute. We are very familiar with their capabilities and what they're going to bring to this organization to make the best possible use of every single organ, that could possibly be donated."

<https://youtu.be/bOuGeMEjgDc>

He continued talking about the different transplant programs and the support that families have before, during and after transplants.

"As the Hudson Valley's only academic medical system, we recognize that our responsibility extends beyond performing these extraordinary procedures. It includes advancing medical knowledge, educating the next generation of healthcare professionals, and helping patients navigate what can be a long and difficult journey. None of this is possible without organ donors and their families. Behind every successful transplant is an act of extraordinary generosity, and behind every patient waiting for an organ is a family hoping for more time together."

That is why Lauren's advocacy matters so much to us. She understood both sides of that equation, the skill of the medical teams who made transplantation possible, and the generosity of the people who give others a second chance at life. Lauren's advocacy helped bring about Lauren's Law, which requires New York driver's license applicants to respond to the organ donation question. It gives each applicant a moment to consider a choice that could save someone's life, a remarkable contribution. At WMC Health, we are incredibly grateful for the donors and families who make transplantation possible, and honoring Lauren helps us continue the conversation that she started. Jeannie, David, (Shields) thank you for being with us today. We are grateful for the opportunity to remember Lauren with you and recognize the difference she made. Your family's legacy lives on in every single milestone celebrated by a life extended or made better by organ transplantation."

Lawler and Gottheimer were now present.



Congressman Mike Lawler

"It is now my pleasure to welcome Congressman Mike Lawler for his remarks. Congressman Lawler, we are especially grateful for your leadership and your continued engagement and unwavering support for the healthcare needs of the Hudson Valley. As the representative of New York's 17th Congressional District, you understand how important it is for families throughout our region to have access to advanced lifesaving medical care close to home."

"We appreciate your willingness to listen to the challenges facing patients, families, and healthcare providers and to bring those concerns into the national conversation and to act on what you learned. Thank you for bringing us together today to recognize Lauren's extraordinary legacy. Your participation helps ensure that her story continues to reach new audiences and inspire others to consider the gift of life. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Congressman Mike Lawler."

[https://youtu.be/X\\_5Yb\\_ECIIo](https://youtu.be/X_5Yb_ECIIo)

"I want to thank Congressman Lawler for his thoughtful remarks and especially for his leadership in helping us honor Lauren and her family. We're incredibly excited to hear about this bill which expands Lauren's work in such a meaningful way. If you look at countries all across the world, the easier you make it for organ donation to occur, the more organ donations that occur and the more lives are saved and extended and made, more joyous. So, this is really, really an important act. It's now my great pleasure to introduce Congressman Josh Gottheimer, who represents New Jersey's 5th Congressional District."

"Congressman Gottheimer has built a reputation for bringing people together around issues that matter to families and communities.



Congressman Josh Gottheimer

His emphasis on bipartisan cooperation reflects an understanding that meaningful progress often requires us to look beyond political differences and focus on the people we serve and the common principles that we hold. It's not that hard to find actually if we just look for it. That spirit is especially important in healthcare where the challenges facing patients and families don't recognize state boundaries or political affiliations. Congressman, we deeply appreciate your commitment to working with colleagues across the aisle and your willingness to lend your voice to this important cause. Your presence today, your presence today alongside and sitting right next to Congressman Lawler sends a powerful message about the importance of organ donation and the lasting impact of Lauren's advocacy and it demonstrates something that those of us, those of us in medicine, and medicine understand very well. When we work together around a shared purpose, we can make an extraordinary difference. Thank you for joining us, for honoring Lauren's family, and for helping carrying her work forward.”

<https://youtu.be/QFgORMOXiI8>

The next person to speak was Lauren's mother, Jeannie Shields.



Jeannie Shields

Lauren was a force in this community, passed 4 months ago. Jeannie is a Rockland County resident and a committed advocate who continues to raise awareness for organ donation.

<https://youtu.be/UbCTGsf0xsY>

The next speaker represented an organization whose work is central to the legacy we are honoring today, Donate Life New York State plays a vital role in educating the public about organ, eye and tissue donation, encouraging donor registration, and helping more New Yorkers understand the extraordinary difference one donor can make. That mission is deeply connected to Lauren's story. She understood that awareness leads to action. One person's decision to become an organ donor can give many other people the opportunity for longer, healthier lives. Under the leadership of Executive Director Aisha Tator, Donate Life New York State continues to advance this important work, bringing together healthcare organizations, community partners, donor families, and transplant recipients around a shared commitment to saving lives. Aisha, thank you for your leadership, your advocacy, and your dedication to ensuring that Lauren's message continues to reach your generations.

“Good afternoon everybody. I'm Aisha Tator. I'm the executive director of Donate Life New York State. It is really an honor to be here with all of you today and of course our partners at Westchester Medical Center. So, our mission is simple, but it is critically important. We come to work every day to make sure that the thousands of New Yorkers, and right now we have over 8000 New Yorkers who are waiting for a life-saving transplant, receive one. We actually have the 3rd highest need in the country. Our vision is to make sure that every single one of those people receive that life-changing, lifesaving gift. Jean, my friend, I want to begin by recognizing you and the extraordinary legacy That you and Lauren have given the donation and transplant community here in New York.”

<https://youtu.be/6Jhp6KgeEFU>

“I now want to introduce Scott Wool, vice president of Community and Public Affairs at Live On New York, another organization that is an essential partner in our life saving work, and Roxanne Watson, a heart transplant recipient and organ transplantation advocate who personally has registered over 14,000 organ donors herself. That's pretty amazing.

Wool spoke first. “Good afternoon. On behalf of Live on New York, our president and CEO Leonard Chan and the dedicated people who work every day to save lives through organ and tissue donation, thank you for this extraordinary recognition for Lauren Shields, our colleague. For those of us who live in New York, Lauren was more than just a young woman whose name became synonymous with the organ donation registration and the state law, worked with her as a volunteer, worked with her as a co-worker. She was very special to our entire team, and Jean, you know that because you were always in town, so thank you for sharing her with us and our organization. At just 12 years old, Lauren's advocacy helped inspire the passage of Lauren's Law, as we've heard.



Scott Wool

According to Wool, this law transformed organ donation registration for New York by ensuring that every New Yorker applying for a driver's license would be asked to consider becoming an organ donor. She believed that everyone should have the opportunity to make an informed decision about giving the gift of life. That belief rests on a fundamental human right, each person's right to decide what happens to their own body.

Wool continued, "Every person deserves access to accurate information, the freedom to make that decision without pressure, and respect for the decision that they have made, and Lauren never stopped fighting for that belief. Today as lawmakers take steps to bring Lauren's Law to the national level, we are reminded of something remarkable. One woman armed with courage, dedication, and a mission literally can change the world, and she did change our state for the better. Thank you."

"Our CEO Leonard Chan said something after Lauren's passing that has stayed with all of us. Lauren spent her life honoring our donor heroes and while doing so, she became one of ours as well. We wish that Lauren could be here standing with us today. Her strength gave us strength. Her commitment will live on with us every day as we carry our work forward. Lauren spent her life, giving hope to others. Today we have the opportunity to ensure that her legacy goes far beyond the state of New York and throughout the United States of America.

I would like to introduce I guess Frack to Lauren's Frick, Roxanne Watson, who has again been indicated as a prolific advocate for organ donation throughout the state, 14,000 unmatched enrolled unmatched throughout the country and throughout the world, 14,000 single-handedly enrolled organ donors. We are fortunate to call her one of our more active volunteers to say the least. Roxanne herself is a beneficiary of not one but 2 heart transplants, so the fact that she's still out there tirelessly is a remarkable gift in and of itself and a miracle, and I think your words today are probably going to be some of the most profound. You spent far more time with her than anybody who worked with her kids."



Roxanne Watson

<https://youtu.be/R9B9AaQl2TA>

The doctor came back up and said, "It is a testimony though to how good people are. If you just bring something to their attention. A lot of times they just say yes because there are a lot of good people around. Just go to the Palisades Mall, talk to some people. Congressman Lawler and Congressman Gottheimer, I want to thank you for using your positions of public trust to bring attention to organ donation and for continuing in such an impactful way through legislation, your bill will save many, many lives. It will give Americans clearly on both sides of the aisle the opportunity to do the right thing, and I trust that many, many, many of them will, and many, many more lives will be saved because of what you've

He thanked everyone for their contributions to this event and the effort to get people to sign up for organ donating.

**Congressman  
Mike Lawler  
delivers for the  
Hudson Valley.**

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COMMON SENSE.  
PROBLEM SOLVER.**

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