

TESTIMONY OF THE GIVE LIFE FOUNDATION BEFORE THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BLOOD SAFETY AND AVAILABILITY

Good Afternoon. My name is Bart S. Fisher and I am Chairman of the Give Life Foundation.

I appreciate the opportunity to brief the Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability ("ACBSA") on the activities of the Give Life Foundation and the steps it is undertaking to increase the availability of blood for the nation.

We leave to others the job of safety. Our focus is on increasing the availability of blood. For without the underlying blood product the issue of safety does not arise--so getting enough blood is the first order of business.

I would first like to tell you something about the Give Life Foundation. It is a start-up. Patrick Hughes, our President and CEO, and I, organized the Foundation last year as a Section 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit foundation with headquarters in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the Give Life Foundation is to increase the donation of blood, blood products, organs, and tissues. We intend to support the activities of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in its efforts to create "Donation Nation." For more information about the Give Life Foundation you may visit our web site at www.give-life.org

We believe the following. There's a destiny which guides us. None goes his way alone. And when we donate the gift of life to others we enrich the life that is our own.

No man is an island. We are instead bridges to islands of need--people who need blood, organs, and tissues.

And, make no mistake about it, as you have heard all day today, the need for of blood, organs, and tissues is one of the central problems in our healthcare system.

Much progress has been made. Much needs to be done.

Our particular goal at the Give Life Foundation is to forge a public/private partnership between the private sector and the Government to do what needs to be done.

We look out in the land and see fewer than 5 percent of those able to donate blood doing so. We see blood collections down 20 percent last year, and less blood donated last year than four years ago. We see a nation living under the probability of another terrorist attack with only 500 units of blood prepositioned in this country for such an emergency. According to the Catastrophic Incident Supplement to the National Response Plan (June, 2004) in a catastrophic incident there "will be a need for blood and blood products," and "currently, blood reserves for national emergencies consist of 500 units of pre-tested, prepositioned packed red cells held at the Armed Services Whole Blood Process Laboratories (250 on east coast, 250 on west coast)."

The availability of only 500 units of blood for a natural or man-made disaster is a startling gap in the nation's homeland security effort. The shortage of blood in the nation is now no longer just a health problem--it is a national security issue.

First responders are entitled to the tools that will enable them to do their job in the event of a terrorist attack. Blood is a vital public health resource that must be readily available at all times, and unfortunately the supply of blood in the United States fluctuates from a one-day to a four-day supply--significantly below the seven-day inventory recommended by the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB) Interorganizational Task Force on Domestic Disasters and Acts of Terrorism. As an example of the critical blood shortage this country faces, one only has to recall that on January 1, 2004, when the Department of Homeland Security raised the alert level to Code Orange in every major city, the Red Cross had only a two-day supply of blood available--far too little to handle any possible critical need that might have arisen. Moreover, if metropolitan areas are struck by a terrorist attack involving biological agents, their collection centers could be shut down and their blood quarantined. Thus, the threat of bioterrorism exacerbates the inadequacy of the nation's blood supply.

So what is to be done? The time has come to change the entire culture of donation in this country. To again have Americans ask not what their country can do for them, but what they can do for their country and their fellow man. And one thing we can all do is to give the Gift of Life, to agree to donate blood, organs and tissues.

Our strategy is a simple one. We will have a public awareness campaign to promote the donation of blood, organs and tissues that both focuses on younger donors and harnesses the power of New Year's Day.

We need to capture the imagination of a younger generation of Americans new to the idea of donating blood, organs and tissues. We will reach this much younger demographic through the use of celebrities known and admired by this younger group of donors. And we intend to have every American make it his or her New Year's Resolution to give the Gift of Life. We are planning to do this through Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and our New Year's Celebration of Life--a television program that will feature entertainers and top musicians, not to mention the glittery ball falling in Times Square on New Year's Eve.

The second part of our New Year's-related activities involves working with the network of the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), the nation's oldest and largest association of marketing students. Through DECA we have the potential to reach up to 300,000 students and teachers from more than 5,000 high schools and 1,500 college chapters and affiliates. Events such as dance marathons around the holiday season will be used to raise awareness of the blood supply and the need for a national blood reserve.

The third part of our New Year's activities will involve ancillary athletic events such as the New Year's bowl games, and we are in discussions now on how to use these platforms.

I would like to spend the remainder of my time describing our activities in Congress to promote a National Blood Reserve that would be ready for use in the event of a terrorist attack. We are seeking \$17.4 million from Congress for a National Blood Reserve, to be spent over the next 2-year period, with half of those funds to be used for the acquisition of supplies, and half of the funds to be used for an awareness campaign to promote the donation of blood in this country. While we do not have a commitment for a line item appropriation for funding the National Blood Reserve yet, we are working on such a line item in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations bill. We hope to at least have Report language for the bill directing the Department of Homeland Security, in coordination with HHS, to develop a plan to implement the National Blood Reserve program proposed by the AABB Interorganizational Task Force on Domestic Disasters and Acts of Terrorism. This plan would identify the most effective means of implementing a National Blood Reserve Program and creating a broader national donation awareness campaign to assure a sufficient supply of blood to meet emergency needs. The plan would also provide descriptions of agency roles and responsibilities and recommend an amount of funding necessary to establish and maintain a National Blood Reserve Program. This bill would provide for fiscal year (FY) 2005 funds, *if* we are successful in obtaining any funding from Congress.

But we have chosen not to wait for 2005. We don't think terrorists are thinking in terms of funding cycles. So we have submitted an unsolicited proposal to both DHS and HHS seeking \$8 million for a national public awareness campaign, to be funded out of FY 2004 funds that have been appropriated but not yet spent.

The Department of Homeland Security, in a letter to me dated July 21, 2004, from Dr. P.L. Estacio, has already indicated its support for the establishment of a National Blood Reserve (NBR), so we are optimistic that it will act favorably on our unsolicited proposal.

We can not afford to fail. And we do not intend to fail. I was the founder of the Aplastic Anemica and MDS International Foundation in 1983, co-founder of the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP), and am a member of the Board of Directors of The Marrow Foundation. I have progressively broadened the target--I think it must now be our mission to create Donation Nation, because the rising tide of donation will lift all of the boats in its wake--blood, organs, and tissues.

For they are inter-related. One gets HLA-marrow typed at a blood collection center; the most committed marrow donors are long-time platelet donors, and a single body can give the Gift of Life to 50 different families.

Americans are a good and generous people. And they respond to *individual* campaigns related to people they know in their community. But giving blood, organs, and tissues is *not* now the default solution, the thing that is routinely done by the majority of the population. Our challenge is to make someone else's day brighter, to make someone else's life longer, to make us donors and donees. blood brothers, one nation. Undivided.

As Hillel, the wise philosopher, once said: if I am for myself alone what am I; if I am not for me who will be; and if not now, when?

Thank you.