

## 2025 OPTN Board of Directors Biographical and Personal Statements

<b><i>Transplant Physician and Surgeon Representatives</i></b>	<b>3</b>
Alan Reed, MD, MBA, FACS	3
Dan Meyer, MD	3
Shelley Hall, MD	5
Kymberly D. Watt, MD	5
George Bayliss, MD	7
John C. Magee, MD	8
Joseph Magliocca, MD	9
<b><i>Patient, Donor, and Family Member Representatives</i></b>	<b>10</b>
John J. Sperzel III, BS	10
Gitthaline (Candie) Gagne, USN, HM1 (Ret.)	11
Justin Wilkerson, MBA	11
Peter Nicastro, MS, MBA	13
Jen Benson, BA	14
James Cason, MA	15
Cody Reynolds	16
John Hodges, MA	17
William (Bill) Ryan, MBA	18
<b><i>Organ Procurement Organization Representatives</i></b>	<b>20</b>
Samantha Endicott, MPH, CPTC	20
Darren Lahrman, MBA, CPTC, BSRC	21
Kevin Lee, MPA	22
<b><i>Transplant Hospital Representative</i></b>	<b>24</b>
Joshua Gossett, DNP, MBA, RN, FACHE	24
<b><i>Voluntary Health Association Representative</i></b>	<b>25</b>
Annette Needham, DNP, NP-C, NEA-BC, CCTC	25

<b>Histocompatibility Representative</b>	<b>26</b>
Cathi Murphey, PhD, MS	26
<b>Non-Transplant Professional Representatives</b>	<b>27</b>
Jerold Mande, MPH	27
Mary E. Homan, DrPH, MA, MSCHE	28
<b>Regional Councillors</b>	<b>30</b>
Region 1 Councillor: Nahel Elias, MD	30
Region 2 Councillor: Kenneth Chavin, MD, MBA, PhD	31
Region 3 Councillor: Ari Cohen, MD, MBA	32
Region 4 Councillor: Ryan Davies, MD	33
Region 5 Councillor: Andrew M. Courtwright, MD, PhD	34
Region 6 Councillor: Gina-Marie Barletta, MD	35
Region 7 Councillor: Reynold Lopez-Soler, MD, PhD	36
Region 8 Councillor: Mark Wakefield, MD	37
Region 9 Councillor: Meelie DebRoy, MD	37
Region 10 Councillor: Austin Schenk, MD, PhD, FACS	38
Region 11 Councillor: Vincent Casingal, MD	39

## Transplant Physician and Surgeon Representatives

### **Alan Reed, MD, MBA, FACS**

**Professor and Chief of Transplant and HPB Surgery, Iowa Carver College, Director, Iowa Health Care Organ Transplant Center, and Adjunct Professor of Accounting, Henry B. Tippie School of Management, University of Iowa**

**Biographical Statement.** Alan Reed, MD, MBA, FACS, is a Professor and Chief of Transplant and HPB Surgery at University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine and Director of the Iowa Health Care Organ Transplant Center. He is also an adjunct professor of accounting at the Henry B. Tippie School of Management at the University of Iowa. He has been an abdominal solid organ transplant surgeon for 35 years. He has experience in strategic planning, financial analysis, strategic cost accounting, and human talent management. He has served the transplant community in leadership roles at the OPTN, the American Society of Transplant Surgeons (ASTS), and Iowa Donor Network.

Dr. Reed started his academic career at the University of Iowa in 2007 and, prior to that, he held academic positions at the University of Rochester in Rochester, NY (1991–1994), and the University of Florida College of Medicine in Gainesville, FL (1994–2007). He received a BS in biology *summa cum laude* from Hobart College in Geneva, NY, in 1980, an MD from Cornell University Medical College in 1984, and an MBA from the Henry B. Tippie School of Management at the University of Iowa in 2012. He did a residency in general surgery at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center (1984–1989) and a fellowship in multi-organ abdominal transplantation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1989–1991).

**Personal Statement.** It is a time of momentous change in the transplant ecosystem and with change comes wonderful opportunity. Daunting? Yes, but also exciting. And if not experienced transplant professionals at the tip of the spear, then who? If chosen, I would use my experience and skill sets to help the new board navigate the changes in OPTN functions and oversight; align all the current and (soon to be new) stakeholders through appropriate communications, metrics, incentives and improved allocation efficiencies; and ensure all voices, especially those of the patients we serve, have a seat at the table.

### **Dan Meyer, MD**

**Chief of Heart Transplantation and Mechanical Circulatory Support, Chair of Cardiovascular Surgery, and Chief of Cardiac Transplantation and Advanced Cardiac Circulatory Support, Baylor Scott and White Health – Dallas**

**Biographical Statement.** I am truly honored to be considered for a position on the OPTN Board of Directors and appreciate the responsibility that is associated with this important opportunity. I believe my experience in the transplant community, specifically with the role of leading the development of the current modified heart allocation system is in concert with the mission of the OPTN, an equitable and efficient allocation process. My philosophy in caring for the patient is one of profound advocacy, especially important in the transplant population, while being well aware of the importance and responsibility of organ stewardship. Moreover, serving on the OPTN Membership and Professional Standards Committee (MPSC) gave me a window as to what can be done to optimize the allocation and

distribution processes on many levels. I feel my current roles both in my civilian and Navy settings provides many of the skills helpful in continuing the efforts by so many caring professionals that have come before me. Thank you for your consideration.

**Personal Statement.** My involvement with the OPTN has been both a major focus as well as a highlight of my career, as it has been an honor and privilege to interact with the dedicated and passionate members of the transplant community over a span of over 25 years. As the Chair of the Heart Subcommittee of the OPTN Thoracic Organ Transplantation Committee, I worked with an incredible group of clinicians, transplant professionals, administrators, statisticians, and patient advocates to develop the modified heart allocation system, released in 2018. This effort of so many led to a decreased waiting list mortality and improved geographic access by providing organs to the most critically ill candidates. As a member of the transplant community, I am aware of the critical role the OPTN has in the equitable allocation of these scarce donor organs. It would be an honor to have the opportunity as a member of the OPTN Board of Directors to contribute during this pivotal time in the field of transplantation and organ allocation.

In addition to the profound honor and responsibility with which I was fortunate enough to participate, I have had other roles in the transplant community. These include early OPTN involvement as the Region 4 Representative, membership in the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR) Technical Advisory Committee and most recently, as a member of the OPTN MPSC. I found the ability to make positive changes to the allocation process and transplant system in general during my time in these different committees extremely important as well as rewarding. To continue to contribute as a member of the OPTN Board of Directors would be in parallel with my personal values and vision as a transplant surgeon and steward of our patients and our donors.

Transplantation has been my focus throughout my career, from my training in Heart Transplantation at the Cleveland Clinic to my current role as Chief of Heart Transplantation and Mechanical Circulatory Support at my institution, Baylor Scott and White Health – Dallas. I remain actively involved in research as well by participating in the Society of Thoracic Surgeons INTERMACS Registry, publishing the 2024 Annual Report in January 2025. Moreover, I have been focused on innovation, in part by involvement as an FDA Panel Member – Circulatory System Devices Panel of the Medical Devices Advisory Committee, Center for Devices and Radiological Health. I am both dedicated and determined to find equitable and innovative solutions to the challenges involved in heart transplantation and organ allocation.

To uphold the Final Rule would always be forefront in the vision as a member of the OPTN Board of Directors. As stated, the equitable allocation of donor organs is critical to the process as well as ensuring the trust of the community at large. Moreover, distribution to maximize pre- and post-transplant survival remains a key charge while taking into account some areas that have been overlooked in the past. Some of these areas include distribution to patients with underserved disease processes or limited distribution secondary in social issues. Equitable allocation on a more global basis would be an important part of my vision if selected for the OPTN Board of Directors.

***Shelley Hall, MD***

**Chief of Transplant Cardiology, Congestive Heart Failure and Mechanical Circulatory Support, Baylor University Medical Center**

**Biographical Statement.** I have been an active participant in the OPTN process for over 15 years, starting as a Regional Review Board member, then Region 4 Representative on the Thoracic Committee and ultimately the Heart Committee chair. I am currently on the MPSC and Multi-Organ Transplantation Committee and am the current Region 4 Associate Councillor. I staunchly support continual improvement in the allocation process.

**Personal Statement.** I am a transplant cardiologist practicing at Baylor University Medical Center my entire career, nearing 28 years. I have been an avid participant in the heart allocation process with the OPTN for over a decade starting on the Regional Review Board, progressing to Region 4 Representative on the Thoracic Committee, chairing the new Heart Committee, and currently Associate Councillor for Region 4 and serving on the MPSC. I have always believed in active participation in the OPTN process as a vocal cheerleader, councillor, or scientific advisor. Our transplant system is the best in the world due to the open collaboration among physicians, OPOs, administrators and patients. I want to continue those efforts as a Board member.

My research interests lie in progressing the transplant process and finding ways to do less to our patients. Our center was an early adopter of a biopsy minimization and promoting noninvasive surveillance. We also push the boundaries in trying to “make every heart work” to allow more patients the chance at a longer better life. These forward-thinking moves will be necessary as our national transplant system evolves, and I know I can be a constructive voice for our patients and our profession.

***Kymerly D. Watt, MD***

**Medical Director of Liver Transplantation Program, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science, and Professor of Medicine, Mayo Clinic**

**Biographical Statement.** I am passionate about this opportunity to serve on the OPTN Board of Directors. The coming years will see tremendous change in health care delivery and we in transplantation need to be leading and guiding this change. This requires a strong diverse team and a united front. I am a strong team player with a deep understanding of the multiple layers of transplantation. Helping everyone on either side of the donation/transplantation journey drives the desire to do this better, easier, and ubiquitously.

Why me? I bring multiple skills to the table. I am a full-time clinician with 20+ years of experience in transplant hepatology. I perform long-term outcomes research in all solid organ transplantation, with a goal to improve survival for all transplant recipients. I have led, as a medical director of liver transplantation institutionally, chaired societal committees, and established a donor driven educational collaborative (“Liver Givers”). At the institutional and medical society level, I have been deeply involved in equity and diversity committees. I am committed to improving access to transplant for all patients. I serve on the council for the International Liver Transplant Society (ILTS), with deep connections globally that provide considerable insight into global organ donation and allocation systems from which we can learn. My tenure through two committee appointments on the OPTN Liver and Intestine Committee

fostered an intense desire to be more integrally involved in policy development. To contribute to the OPTN Modernization provides no greater opportunity to have a lasting impact on transplantation in the U.S. I will work hard for this Board and for the transplant community.

**Personal Statement.** Since the Industrial Revolution, companies have adopted task specific specialization and collaborative practice to increase productivity, achieve common goals, while at the same time fostering employee engagement. Knowledge sharing drives efficiency and productivity. I see the goals of the OPTN Modernization Initiative as an opportunity to facilitate specialization and collaboration to fundamentally change and improve organ transplantation across the country. We must ensure all patients in need of organ transplant have access to an organ transplant while maximally optimizing that patient's safety. We must foster a strong collaborative environment to achieve these goals.

I am a Professor of Medicine and transplant hepatologist in a busy transplant center at Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, that provides both deceased and live donor liver transplant. I have served as both medical director of transplant, as the live donor program director and member of the transplant executive council at Mayo Clinic. I am deeply involved and held multiple leadership roles within transplant and hepatology societies such as ILTS, AASLD, and the American Society of Transplantation (AST). My academic career is focused on improving long-term outcomes in the transplant recipient. I have published and spoken extensively in these areas. I am a strong advocate for transplantation on both recipient and donor side of the equation. I completed my second appointment on the OPTN Liver and Intestinal Organ Transplantation Committee, contributing to the development and change of policy relating to liver transplantation in the U.S. The experience has instilled a passion in me to be more involved in policy development and work on the mechanics of the transplant process nationally for all potential transplant recipients and donors. There are many things that can be done to increase organ donation, improve access to organ transplantation, and ensure timely transplantation to all patients in need. I am excited for the opportunity to contribute to these much-needed changes.

The mission of the OPTN has a far-reaching impact on innumerable lives. Unique to transplantation is the balance between the patient in organ failure and the donor. We serve them all. Also unique to transplantation is the level of individual commitment and engagement from multidisciplinary team members on both sides of transplantation. Together, we can coalesce and collaborate to strengthen the mission while innovating and improving transplant practice to move the transplant community forward. This mission is best served with a strong, dedicated team-based effort that unites the transplant community together, and I believe I have the skillset to compliment the Board, bring people together, and help move these initiatives forward.

I believe the future of transplantation is very bright and extremely exciting. I am dedicated to help both the OPTN and the field of transplantation advance and prosper into the next era. I would embrace the role on the OPTN Board, making building a stronger, unified transplant network a priority goal.

Thank you for considering my application.

**George Bayliss, MD**

**Medical Director, Division of Transplantation, Rhode Island Hospital, and Associate Professor of Medicine, Brown University**

**Biographical Statement.** I graduated from Harvard College and worked for small and large news organizations covering everything from school boards and zoning commissions to central banks and national governments. My final post before medical school was as bureau chief for an international news agency reporting on political and economic change in Eastern Europe after the Berlin Wall fell. I have an interest and experience in trying to understand organizations facing rapid change.

After medical school and internal medicine residency at Brown University, I completed my renal fellowship at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. I returned to Brown as a faculty member and general nephrologist in 2008, moving to transplantation full time in 2014. I care for patients with progressive kidney disease, manage their transition to dialysis and referral for transplantation, evaluate them for listing, and care for them post-transplant.

I have volunteered for the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) as a member of its workforce and leadership committees and for the OPTN as a member of its Ethics Committee and as a volunteer on the Ad Hoc International Relations Committee panel revising recommendations on international living donors in the U.S.

I became medical director of transplantation at Rhode Island Hospital in March 2024. I take organ call and recognize the challenges that changes in donor age, recipient age, and organ allocation pose as I evaluate an out-of-sequence kidney offer from 250 NM away, chose our recipient, discuss with the surgeon and patient whether to accept the offer and respond within 30 minutes at 3 a.m.

**Personal Statement.** Thank you for the opportunity to interview for a seat on the OPTN Board. Demand for organ transplants soars while the supply lags. Criticism of organ procurement allocation has driven HRSA to reform the OPTN and its contractor and is pushing efforts to refer more people for kidney transplants, increase organ procurement, and increase kidney transplants. On the patient side, the transplant community is working to increase equitable access to transplantation, redress past wrongs that limited access, and remove racial and geographic barriers to transplantation through efforts like continuous distribution of organs.

The OPTN is at the vortex of these changes. Its Board members are responsible for helping balance the interests of the transplant community and its duty to organ recipients, organ donors, and the health care system. My patient experience as a general and transplant nephrologist and my policy experience as an OPTN volunteer qualify me to serve as a Board member.

We need not only to increase the number of organs recovered and transplanted but improve the quality of organs recovered and their longevity once transplanted. This includes supporting research to improve organ preservation techniques, promoting efforts to reduce cold ischemic time by getting organs to programs that can use them rapidly without violating the waiting list, resolving ethical issues about thoracic normothermic regional perfusion, and engaging in shared decision making with patients about using organs from older sicker donors.



***John C. Magee, MD***

**Attending Surgeon, Division of Transplantation, Jeremiah & Claire Turcotte Professor of Transplant Surgery, Professor of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, University of Michigan**

**Biographical Statement.** I am a Professor of Transplant Surgery at the University of Michigan, where I have been a faculty member for 27 years. My clinical and research career has focused on improving the care of children and adults needing kidney, pancreas, and liver transplantation. I have held multiple leadership positions within my transplant center, as well as within regional and national organizations focused on organ donation and transplantation.

**Personal Statement.** I am stepping forward as a candidate for the OPTN Board from a position of hope and possibility. Transplantation in the U.S. is at a critical inflection point. We have an incredible record of accomplishment. We also must continue to evolve if we are to solve longstanding issues that have been difficult to address. The challenges are immense and ever changing, but the only path is forward. The current Special Election for the OPTN Board represents the next step in this journey.

The newly seated OPTN Board will help chart our course forward and set the tone in our community. Throughout my career, I have actively engaged in multiple opportunities to work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to define the current state and establish a path forward to fulfill a shared mission and values. Through these interactions I have had the opportunity to gather perspectives across organ donation and transplantation, as well as understand the critical need for partnership with patients, donor families, payors, and federal agencies.

I believe I will bring an informed, balanced, and collaborative approach to the Board. I am a Professor of Transplant Surgery at the University of Michigan. My clinical and research career has focused on improving the care of children and adults requiring kidney, pancreas, and liver transplantation. I have a robust appreciation of the challenges facing patients, families, faculty and staff within transplant programs. I have served as the Surgical Director of the Pediatric Liver and Kidney Transplant Programs, as well as our Adult Kidney Transplant Program. I previously served as the Director of our Transplant Center as well as Section Head of Transplant Surgery. I also have a solid appreciation of the challenges facing the organ donation community. Throughout my career I have been actively involved in collaborative efforts with our local OPO, including serving on the Governing Board for the last 7 years. I have participated in efforts to increase both living and deceased organ donation. I have provided leadership for three Health Resources and Services Administration, Division of Transplantation (HRSA-DoT) grants, studying innovative approaches to increase donation in the community. I have also collaborated with leaders in OPOs across our country through my engagement in the Organ Donation & Transplantation Alliance for the last 14 years. I am active within the ASTS and have participated in many initiatives over my career. I have served as chair of the Surgery and Liver Transplantation Committee of the AASLD. I have also partnered with patient advocacy groups for 23 years, including the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan where I have been the Board Chair. I am familiar with data collection and analysis to guide policy development. I served as a Principal with the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR) from 2003 to 2010. In this role I worked with multiple OPTN committees. I am currently the co-chair of the SRTR Review Committee.



I have had the privilege of Board service in many organizations. I understand the critical need for effective, inclusive governance. I am committed to the principles of representation, collaboration, transparency, and accountability. Thank you.

***Joseph Magliocca, MD***

**Professor of Surgery and Pediatrics, Executive Director of the Vanderbilt Transplant Center, and Surgical Director of Pediatric Liver Transplantation, Vanderbilt University Medical Center**

**Biographical Statement.** I grew up in a very blue-collar family in Staten Island, NY, and graduated from the City University of New York and Mount Sinai School of Medicine. I trained in General Surgery at the University of Michigan and in Abdominal Transplant Surgery at the University of Wisconsin. My career has taken me to the University of Florida, Emory University, and now to Nashville, TN, as the Executive Director of the Vanderbilt Transplant Center, the third largest transplant center in the nation. This has provided perspective to realize the very regional- and demographic-specific issues that affect our transplant patients before, during, and after organ transplantation.

My practice focuses on liver transplantation and, particularly, transplantation in children, who I view as our most vulnerable patient population. Children have specific and unique needs that require consideration when developing organ transplantation policy. I am an active member of the ASTS and have served on multiple committees and Task Forces. I am currently a member of the ASTS Pediatric Transplant Advisory Committee.

**Personal Statement.** Over the span of my career, I have seen dramatic changes in allocation policy, organ preservation technology, organ recovery methods, and technological advances. Each of these changes has significantly impacted the practice of transplantation, for better or worse. I believe the most important part of the introduction of any disruptive transformation must be to consider the “unintended consequences” and “behavioral practice changes” that will undoubtedly ensue. This is the specific location where I feel that we have lost ground. Within the previously existing leadership structures, we have lost transparency in policy making, have ignored expert opinion and pushed forward policy that may not be in the best interests of all involved, and, most importantly, have lost sight of the mission of the OPTN, which is to serve patients in need of organ transplantation. That includes those with the good fortune to have ready access to care and, crucially, for those who may not yet have that access. We must always consider how policy will affect all patients.

I am convinced that I possess the experience and expertise in organ transplantation and the unique perspective that comes with practicing in various regions of our country and treating our adult and pediatric transplant populations, which would allow me to serve fairly and open-mindedly on the OPTN Board of Directors.

## Patient, Donor, and Family Member Representatives

### *John J. Sperzel III, BS*

**Previously Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, T2 Biosystems, Inc.; Heart Transplant Recipient**

**Biographical Statement.** As a candidate for the OPTN Board of Directors, I bring a wealth of board governance and executive leadership experience. Over the course of my career, I have served as Chair of the Board, Board Member, Executive Committee Member, Chief Executive Officer, President, and Vice President across seven healthcare companies, including T2 Biosystems, Inc. (NASDAQ: TTOO), Chembio Diagnostics, Inc. (NASDAQ: CEMI), Accriva Dx, Axis-Shield, Inc. (LSE: ASD), Bayer Diagnostics (BAYN: DE), Werfen, and Boehringer Mannheim/Roche (ROG.SW). I have also served as an independent Board Member for Diadexus, Inc. (NASDAQ: DDXS), Ontera Bio, RVR Diagnostics, OrangeLife Healthcare, the Diagnostics Marketing Association (Board President), the American Diabetes Association of New England, the Association for Diagnostic & Laboratory Medicine, and the Sepsis Alliance Advisory Board.

I hold a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Plymouth State University, where I also had the honor of leading the football team as quarterback to two New England Conference titles and two Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) championships.

**Personal Statement.** In 2017, I faced a life-altering challenge when I was diagnosed with Giant Cell Myocarditis—one of the rarest and most lethal medical conditions, with approximately 300 known cases and a median survival of 4–5 months post-diagnosis. After being told my chance of survival was less than 5%, I spent two months in a cardiac surgical ICU, underwent multiple surgeries, and was placed on life support. On July 8, 2017, I was blessed to receive a life-saving heart transplant.

My candidacy for the OPTN Board of Directors and my support for the Modernization Initiative are deeply personal. As a heart transplant recipient and a member of the OPTN Patient Affairs Committee, I believe passionately in improving the transparency, accountability, equity, and performance across the organ donation and transplant system.

My vision is for the OPTN to become the most trusted organization in U.S. healthcare. I am committed to ensuring that the OPTN Board of Directors and all committees operate with transparency, integrity, and a patient-first approach—driving progress in critical areas including technology, data transparency and analytics, governance, operations, and quality improvement.

I am a results-driven, collaborative leader with a proven track record in corporate governance and executive leadership. I bring a unique combination of professional expertise and personal insight into the transplant journey. I am eager to contribute to the OPTN's transformational efforts and help shape a more effective and equitable system for all patients.

***Gitthaline (Candie) Gagne, USN, HM1 (Ret.)***

**Previously Level 3 Surgical Technologist, UPMC McKeesport and Retired U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman; Kidney Transplant Recipient**

**Biographical Statement.** Gitthaline A. “Candie” Gagne, USN, HM1 (Ret.), served 17 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring in 1995. She graduated from Hospital Corpsman “A” School and Surgical Technology “C” School, serving at various Naval Medical Facilities, including a four-year tour in Okinawa, Japan. There, she was named the first Enlisted Technical Advisor to the Surgeon General, a role she held for four years. She also served on the American Association of Surgical Technologists, including two years on the National Board of Directors, and studied at the University of Maryland, Asian Pacific Division, and Franciscan University of Steubenville. After retiring, Candie taught in Surgical Technology programs in Greater Pittsburgh, PA, until kidney failure required dialysis and a transplant in June 2018. Since then, Candie has been an advocate with the local OPO, the American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP, where she serves as a board member), NKF, and the American Kidney Fund (AKF), raising awareness for kidney health and supporting transplant patients.

**Personal Statement.** Let me take this opportunity to introduce myself and why I would be honored to serve on the OPTN Board of Directors. I am a retired U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman as well as a retired Certified Surgical Technologist and Healthcare Educator. I am active in the community in the areas of faith, politics and healthcare.

I have many reasons for my interest in organ transplant. I first became interested as a member of the surgical team as a surgical technologist, I never thought that after 40 years in healthcare as a tech then educator, I would find myself so personally involved. My uncle needed a heart and was able to receive one, then I found myself on the list for a kidney. Little did I know that four short months after my transplant, my husband would be listed for a heart and a kidney; he passed away prior to being able to receive this gift. Lastly, my daughter, who was not a match for either her father or me, so she stepped up and gave altruistically to a pediatric patient at our local children’s hospital.

It is because of this history and experience with transplant that I have become a passionate advocate for this cause, and I feel I can bring a lot to the team. Specifically, I have the ability to “translate” medical and scientific jargon into regular English and vice versa. My work as advocate has given me the opportunity to communicate to including the general public, media, social media, and legislators and their staff.

***Justin Wilkerson, MBA***

**Deputy Director of Human Services, Illinois Army National Guard; Liver Transplant Recipient**

**Biographical Statement.** Justin Wilkerson is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Illinois Army National Guard where he has served in command and staff roles over 24 years to include leading during deployments, training exercises, and civil activations. He resides in Peoria, IL, with his wife and living liver donor, Mary, and their three boys. He is an active member of many advocacy organizations including Scouts of America, the Veterans of Foreign War, the American Legion, Military Officers Association of America, and the Military Police Regimental Association. Justin has received many service awards including from

the State of Louisiana for Hurricane Katrina, for service as the commander during the Chicago civil unrest in 2020, and for lifetime achievement as a Military Police officer.

Justin had a passion to understand why some patients died on the waitlist. This curiosity led him to a regional representative position on the OPTN Patient Affairs Committee in 2021, where he was able to use his experience managing organizations, developing policy, and communicating strategy to help the OPTN and the Patient Affairs Committee. Justin developed a deep understanding of the U.S. transplantation system and will continue serving the patient community using that knowledge along with his skills and experience to improve outcomes.

**Personal Statement.** My request is that you vote for those who will represent the long-term interests of patients best—those who possess the will, the energy, the intellect, and the finesse to effectively implement the Modernization initiatives.

My service on the Patient Affairs Committee has been influenced by two factors: my personal transplant experience and my military service. I see an appointment on the Board as the philosophical equivalent to a military command assignment: if done well, it should be both a privilege and a burden—the privilege is the trust given to lead and be an advocate for our most precious resource, the men and women in service (our patients); the burden is the commitment of time needed effectively execute a command combined with the stress of weighing options to make difficult decisions (implementing Modernization and developing policy). Should you select me, I will approach the Board duties with that position in mind.

My transplant journey began in 2012, when I was diagnosed with primary sclerosing cholangitis. On August 17, 2021, my hero, my wife Mary, donated her liver to me. While we recovered in the hospital, I decided to make it my mission to give back to the transplant community. I understood that my access to medical resources and support networks, both at home and at work, was atypical. I wanted to help those less fortunate gain access to the resources that I had, and I wanted to promote organ donation—both living and deceased.

Having been on the Patient Affairs Committee for over three years, I have watched the OPTN go through fundamental change and am excited at the opportunity that Modernization brings. I have been a strong contributor on the Patient Affairs Committee. I have been a voice for the patient community and have been noted for my policy analysis, my written communication, and for my collaboration with Patient Affairs Committee members, patients, OPOs, and transplant centers. I am fascinated by all of their experiences and perspectives and seek to hear their concerns and to synthesize all of this information into my approach on the Patient Affairs Committee. If selected, I will do the same on the Board.

As an officer in the military, I have served in senior positions of leadership for the past eight years to include on-the-ground command during the civil unrest in Chicago in 2020. I have served in organizations where I spearheaded organizational change, organizational culture, strategic development, and executive communications. I have extensive policy development and process improvement experience. Should you select me for a Board position, I will bring all of my skills and experiences to bear in driving improvements for transplant patients. I will be personally accountable to represent all patients, donors, and their families in the work we do. Before the Board, my message will be focused and strong in representing the best interests of transplant patients across our nation. We

need a Board that can execute the steps necessary to carry the OPTN through its most fundamental change since its formation in 1984.

***Peter Nicastro, MS, MBA***

**Previously Finance Director, Cigna; Lung Transplant Recipient**

**Biographical Statement.** Peter Nicastro was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis (CF) at age two and a half, at a time when most children with CF did not reach their teens. Despite his physical limitations and frequent hospitalizations, he excelled, graduating from Saint Louis University with an Honors Bachelor of Science in Chemistry degree and as a Goldwater Scholar. He received a double lung transplant in 1998. Following, he worked as a protein biochemist in drug discovery and development, then as a finance director, receiving a Master of Science in Biology from the University of Missouri—St. Louis while receiving hemodialysis. He received his first kidney transplant in 2005. He later completed an MBA from the Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis, finishing first in class, and received a second kidney transplant in 2024.

Peter has volunteered in organ donation awareness and program management, primarily as a member and sometimes chairman and vice-chairman of Missouri's state Organ Donation Advisory Committee since 2006, among other community and church volunteer roles. He is most proud of his family: his wife, a successful community pediatrician, and two teenage children, something unthinkable to CF patients in the 1970s and 1980s.

**Personal Statement.** I am very grateful to be the recipient of three separate organ transplants. In 1998, I received the lungs of Paul Prins, an Air Force veteran from Louisiana who was murdered in his home. My 2005 living-donor kidney transplant was from my wife's sister's brother-in-law, and my recent kidney transplant was from an anonymous donor, as part of a donor chain that included a friend from college, something illegal when I received my first kidney. In each case where I received a kidney, I spent time on hemodialysis prior to transplant. Whether in pulmonary rehab prior to my lung transplant or the dialysis clinic prior to the kidneys, I watched as my fellow patients deteriorated with me, including some who died waiting. I am committed to increasing the donation rate and shortening the wait for organs.

Since my initial lung transplant, I have married, finished two degrees, fathered two children—who are now fifteen and succeeding in high school—and given back to my local and the transplant community. I coached softball for my daughter and am a volunteer with my son's Scout troop. Since 2006, I have been a member of the Missouri Organ Donation Advisory Committee, which assists the Missouri Department of Health in promoting donation, running the registry, and funding the program. Because of my business and science education, I initially recognized the deteriorating financial situation of the fund and, as chairman, wrote a law and coordinated with partners to create an income tax check-off to bolster the fund. Later, the law, which initially had a sunset clause, was made permanent. I also first asked our governor to proclaim April as Organ, Eye, and Tissue Awareness Month, and created an annual donor family recognition day at our state capital, supported by our local OPOs and increasingly popular. I have taught Scout units and spoken to religious groups—from Catholic parishes to the Ethical Society—about the gift that organ donation is and the importance of clear donor designation, and presented awards at DMV offices that had the best donor designation rates. My transplants have been a gift, but also an

opportunity to have lived zealously, shared the dividends of the gifts I received, and persuaded others to support donation in diverse ways.

After nearly 20 years on the committee, many of my ideas for our state team have been adopted or at least considered. Appointment to the OPTN Board would allow me to leverage my experience there, training, and life experience to represent the needs of recipient families and impact the conditions and infrastructure to make organ donation faster and more effective.

### ***Jen Benson, BA***

**Chief Executive Officer and Founder of The Transplant Journey Inc. and The Transplant Collective, and Operations Manager, RLBenson & Associates; Pancreas and Kidney Transplant Recipient**

**Biographical Statement.** After graduating from Wheaton College in 2003 with a BA in Philosophy and a minor in Biology, Jen Benson initially explored careers bridging her passions for healthcare and fashion. Her personal battle with type 1 diabetes forged deep medical community connections, leading her to intern at a local hospital's Emergency Department while considering a Physician Assistant degree.

Recognizing limitations in traditional medicine, Jen pivoted to fashion in New York City before following her father's footsteps into Retained Executive Search, where she thrived professionally.

Jen's life transformed dramatically when a kidney stone triggered sepsis, ultimately requiring a life-saving simultaneous pancreas-kidney transplant. This profound experience unveiled her true calling. In March 2020, she founded The Transplant Journey Inc., which has revolutionized patient support by facilitating 63 transplants and cultivating a thriving community of over 8,200 members. Building on this success, she launched The Transplant Collective in November 2024—an innovative umbrella organization uniting 25 nonprofits dedicated to advancing organ donation and transplantation.

Her extraordinary volunteer leadership spans the Columbia University Irving Medical Center Transplant Forum Executive and Benefit Committees, Hearts for Russ, NY Kidney, serving as OPTN and AKF Ambassador, NKF Peer Mentor, and, recently, DonateLife NY Advisory Council member.

Jen's impactful work has earned recognition through four proclamations from Senator Richard Blumenthal—two honoring her personal advocacy and two celebrating The Transplant Journey's vital contributions to organ donation and awareness.

Jen passionately believes that dismantling organizational silos and fostering unprecedented collaboration will create transformative progress in reducing the national transplant waitlist—a sacred mission born from her donor family's ultimate gift of life and heroism.

**Personal Statement.** Seven years on the transplant waitlist transformed me from patient to advocate, survivor to strategist. During those years, I nearly died three times while awaiting a dual-organ transplant, navigated multiple dialysis modalities, and was multi-listed at centers across the country. Each day brought me face-to-face with the very policies the OPTN Board creates and enforces—not as abstract guidelines, but as life-determining realities that meant the difference between hope and despair for my family and me.

Through this trial, I discovered profound truths about our transplant ecosystem: protocol differences between centers can alter destinies, the ripple effect of transplant medicine extends far beyond the



patient to entire support networks, and transparency coupled with shared resources literally saves lives. These insights fueled my mission to bridge the gap between policy and practice. I founded The Transplant Journey, Inc., a multi-organ, family-centered nonprofit that translates complex medical protocols into practical guidance for patients whose lives hang in the balance. Every day, I help families navigate the labyrinth of listing procedures, post-operative recovery, and psychosocial care across all organ types.

Now, as our transplant system undergoes critical transformation, the OPTN Board needs perspectives forged in the fire of lived experience. I bring the unique ability to foresee how policy decisions will impact real patients before those consequences reach the bedside. I understand viscerally how geography, socioeconomic status, and center-level variability can extend waits or deny second chances altogether. Most importantly, I represent a generation of patients and families who demand that OPTN decisions be grounded in reality, empathy, and accountability—not just statistical models and institutional preferences.

I am ready to convert seven plus years of survival into strategic service, helping craft policies that are efficient, transparent, and compassionate for every organ community. My mission is to serve as that essential bedside-to-boardroom bridge, ensuring that every protocol we create honors the humanity of those it serves while advancing the science that sustains them. I would be honored to bring this hard-won wisdom to the OPTN Board, where together we can strengthen our shared commitment to saving and transforming lives.

### ***James Cason, MA***

#### **Previously Mayor of Coral Gables, FL, and former U.S. Foreign Service Officer; Family of Transplant Recipients and Kidney Transplant Candidate**

**Biographical Statement.** I am a retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer with 38-years of experience in 11 countries leading and managing large, diverse interagency teams, ending my career as Ambassador to Cuba and Paraguay. During my career, I was recognized as an expert negotiator, investigator, and effective motivator of people, with a reputation for strategic vision, reliability, trustworthiness, and for delivering quality results on time. I served as political advisor to a 4-star NATO Admiral and was Chief Inspector of a team examining operations in U.S. Embassies in Jordan and Iraq, the latter then the largest embassy in the world with 29,000 employees, looking for waste, fraud, and mismanagement. Earlier in my career I was Deputy Ambassador in Honduras, our tenth largest post in the world, supervising 1,300 employees in 14 federal agencies, and in Jamaica, our largest Caribbean diplomatic post. I also spent a year studying economics at the Foreign Service Institute and have worked in various capacities with the Coast Guard and the Commerce, Defense, Agriculture, and Interior Departments.

I have received a variety of awards, including six meritorious honor awards, a Superior Honor Award, the State Department's Distinguished Honor Award, the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA's) National HUMINT Intelligence Award, the Joint Chiefs' of Staff Essay Award, the Defense Intelligence Agency's Writing Award, the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff's Joint Meritorious Service Medal, the Coast Guard's Distinguished Public Service Award, the President's Meritorious Service Award for sustained, superior accomplishments in foreign policy and public service, as well as the State Department's Lifetime Achievement Award. I had a Fulbright scholarship while at Johns Hopkins.



On retirement from State, I ran for Mayor of Coral Gables, Florida, a city of 52,000, and was elected three times with 72% of the vote in my second election.

I graduated from Dartmouth College and have a MA from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and am a Distinguished graduate of the National War College. My foreign languages are Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and Guarani.

**Personal Statement.** I suffer from end-stage kidney disease (ESKD) and will shortly be on the kidney transplant list. My family has inherited ADTKD-UMOD, and my mother, three siblings, and a niece have all had transplants, several multiple. My son has inherited the genetic anomaly as well.

The strength of any organization lies in the diverse backgrounds and perspectives each member brings to the table. Although not from the health community, I feel my vast experience in consensus building, successfully managing large diverse organizations, finding ways to become more efficient, and bringing people with differing opinions together to achieve common objectives will serve the OPTN community well. In addition, my upcoming experiences navigating the transplant process should bring fresh perspectives to the OPTN. Especially in south Florida, where I am well known, my international background and Spanish fluency can be useful in getting more Hispanics, in particular, to consider donating organs. If elected, I pledge my enthusiasm and unwavering commitment to become a proactive and innovative member of the OPTN Board, working diligently to support and advance its vital mission.

### ***Cody Reynolds***

#### **Father of a Pediatric Transplant Recipient**

**Biographical Statement.** Cody Reynolds is a full-time employee, full-time husband and parent, servant leader, and advocate for organ transplantation. He graduated from the Jim Evans Academy of Professional Umpiring in 2008 and officiated high levels of college baseball until he and his wife started their family. He is the parent of a pediatric liver recipient, and his objective is to help and support families across Indian Country. Cody has been recognized for his professional service work by being named to the Oklahoma NextGen 30 under 30 list. He has also completed the Schnake, Turbo, Frank Leadership & Reputation Academy in 2016 and the Native Leadership Oklahoma series in 2024. He also holds a business communication certificate from Oklahoma State University.

Cody currently serves on the OPTN Patient Affairs Committee. He also serves as a board member for TRIO-Oklahoma and volunteers with LifeShare Oklahoma. He looks forward to the challenge and opportunity to improve the transplant system so that everyone that needs a transplant has access to be cared for. Cody and his family are citizens of the Chickasaw Nation and they enjoy attending events so that their children are immersed in their culture.

**Personal Statement.** Six years ago, my wife and I welcomed our last child, a daughter. Our world was turned upside down when we found out that she would need a liver transplant. As a parent, you have a duty to nurture and raise your child, even if that means staying up all night in an uncomfortable hospital, just hoping your child lives fight another day. It means learning how to change a PICC line dressing, learning how to place an NG tube because your child pulled it out, administering IV antibiotics twice a day, and sleeping just light enough to hear the feeding pump go off at 2 a.m. while continuing to work 40 hours each week and meeting the needs of our other three children.

It was during those uncertain times that we made the decision to not feel sorry for the cards we were dealt because that is not our culture as a First American family and citizens of the Chickasaw Nation, a tribe known to never have lost a battle because of our warrior spirit. That is the same tenacity that drives me each day and why I was inspired to do more to represent pediatric families, especially minority families and families from rural areas, because that is where I am from and who I relate to.

In 2023, we were able to meet the older sister of our donor. We were able to thank her for making the decision to donate the organs of her little sister. We consider her family, and it has allowed us to create this bond that cannot be put into words. Unless you have been there, there are truly no words to describe the feeling of meeting a donor family. Each extra day that we get to spend with our little girl is a gift and opportunity to honor our donor—a gift that was made possible through organ donation and the sacrifices that surgeons make every day to carefully give others the gift of life.

This journey has given me the opportunity to attend meetings on Capitol Hill, serve on the OPTN Patient Affairs Committee and give back by volunteering with our OPO. But most fulfilling of all has been the friends I've made in the transplant community who just want the best outcomes for their children.

I am asking for your vote to serve on the OPTN Board of Directors. I am a positive and thoughtful leader who is not looking to make enemies but rather to collaborate and find common ground to solve current problems.

### ***John Hodges, MA***

**Previously Faculty Research Assistant, Center for Remote Sensing, Department of Geography, Boston University; Living Kidney Donor**

**Biographical and Personal Statement.** Thank you for this opportunity to again be a candidate for a Board position with the OPTN. I served two terms as a public representative, living donor, 14 to 20 years ago. During that service, I also served on the Kidney Transplantation Committee and the Executive Committee. As often as I have been able, I have continued to attend OPTN Region 1 meetings.

Prior to election to the OPTN Board, I became a volunteer discussion moderator for Living Donors Online, and I still am. In 2004, I was asked by my surgeon to represent modern living donors at a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Ron Herrick's first successful living donor transplant at what was then the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. I was then invited to sit on an ad hoc OPTN committee on the Public Solicitation of Organ Donors. All the foregoing events followed from my own donation. I made a directed unrelated kidney donation to an acquaintance by hand-assisted laparoscopic nephrectomy at Brigham and Women's Hospital in 2003. Both my recipient, now a good friend, and I are doing well 22 years later.

At that time, I had a Research Faculty position at the Boston University Geography Department Center for Remote Sensing. My research was in support of NASA's Mission to Planet Earth, later renamed EOS, the Earth Observing System. The two satellites I provided science code for, Terra and Aqua, are at end of life now, as their station keeping fuel runs low. They will have controlled de-orbit burns soon. My undergraduate degree program was at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Earth and Planetary Physics.

I have been retired for several years and devote my time to supporting the American Red Cross (ARC). I am a 48-year volunteer with the ARC, currently serving as both Volunteer Partner with the Biomedical Services Donor Services Vice President for the Northeast Division (of the United States) and as Green Team (Sustainability) Lead for the Massachusetts Region. I also continue to coordinate award winning community blood drives, and I donate platelets by apheresis. I recently made my 649<sup>th</sup> donation, bringing me to 1,513 units donated, and one kidney.

I offer to again serve as a public representative for you in this time of change and renewal for the OPTN.

***William (Bill) Ryan, MBA***

**Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer of Transplant Life Foundation; Family Member of a Deceased Donor**

**Biographical Statement.** Bill Ryan is President and Chief Executive Officer of The Transplant Life Foundation and is also board chair of Ryan Marketing Group Technologies, an event project management company with over 30 years of experience on world class events including the NCAA Final Four®, FINA World Swimming Championships, FIBA Men's World Basketball Championships, World Cup Soccer, and the Solheim Cup. Bill leads a team of professionals in producing the Transplant Games of America, the largest gathering of transplant recipients and donor families in the world, and most recently has completed a six-year term on the advisory board for Gift of Life Michigan. Bill is a longstanding member of the Michigan Donor Family Council.

With a career-long professional background in voice, data, and broadcast technical experience, Bill has demonstrated leadership skills in managing complex, and diverse business disciplines including data management, large-scale experiential analysis, and oversight of media and marketing divisions.

As a donor parent, Bill has lost two daughters, which has propelled and maintained his involvement in the field of donation and transplantation. He has served the community for almost 40 years and welcomes the opportunity to serve on the OPTN Board.

**Personal Statement.** As Chief Executive Officer and President of the Transplant Life Foundation, I have had the pleasure of serving the donation and transplantation community for almost 40 years. Over this time, I have had the opportunity to touch the lives of hundreds of patients and their families through our advocacy efforts across the nation. The emotional interaction between living donors, donor families, and recipients demonstrates and proves the amazing success of this miracle of transplantation. At its very core, our mission must be to ensure that the experience for all parties continues to be a life enriching event.

As a parent, I was introduced to transplant in 1986, after losing my daughter, Michelle, in an automobile accident. It was her wish to become an organ donor, and her gifts made life possible for a number of patients. In 1999, our family lost a second daughter, Angie, to a life-long physical disability. These life events have given me the opportunity to transform painful losses into a meaningful mission to promote and encourage organ and tissue donation.

Over the course of my business career as an executive in multiple industries, I have the acumen and skill set to review, reflect, and participate in business decisions that further advance the amazing results to

date and, at the same time, build a structure for the future to accommodate the growing need for additional organs.

Leading the Transplant Life Foundation and producing the Transplant Games of America, I have worked alongside thousands of participants across a broad demographic base. Interaction with these patients, caregivers, donors, donor families, and professionals has given me a clear understanding of the needs of this community.

I am excited at the potential of helping impact donation and transplantation rates in communities of color and using my decades of business leadership to help drive innovation and technology to improve end results. I look forward to continuing support of the transplant community and being a part of the OPTN team.

## Organ Procurement Organization Representatives

### ***Samantha Endicott, MPH, CPTC***

#### **Senior Director, Organ Optimization, New England Donor Services**

**Biographical Statement.** Samantha Endicott is the Senior Director of Organ Optimization at New England Donor Services. She has over 20 years of experience in organ and tissue donation and currently oversees a clinical team of over 80 donation professionals stewarding lifesaving organs from initial suitability assessment, optimization, and allocation to surgical recovery. At the national level, Samantha has served as an at-large representative on the OPTN Pediatric Transplantation Committee as well as the Region 1 Representative to the OPO Committee and is currently a member of the Region 1 Nominating Committee. Samantha earned her bachelor's degree in biology and her master's in public health with a concentration in health behavior from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). She is the daughter-in-law of a kidney recipient.

**Personal Statement.** I have worked in the field of organ and tissue donation for 22 years, beginning my career as a per-diem tissue recovery coordinator at what was then the Alabama Organ Center after finishing undergraduate studies at UAB. Following completion of my master's degree in public health from UAB, I transitioned to a full-time role as an Organ Donation Coordinator. I gained experience in many aspects of donation and transplant in my time at the Alabama Organ Center—speaking with donor families about the opportunity their loved ones had to save a life, medically managing donors, allocating organs, fielding organ offers for the transplant center, assisting in organ perfusion and surgical recovery, managing transportation and logistics for both teams and organs, and donor hospital development.

I moved to the Boston area in 2007 and became a Donation Coordinator at New England Donor Services (NEDS, previously known as New England Organ Bank). My scope of practice was smaller, but the population and corresponding volume of work was far greater. I gained experience in pursuing organs that were rarely, if ever, accepted for transplant in my prior donation service area and saw the impact that older, more medically complex and donor after cardiac death donors could still have on recipients. Over my time at NEDS, I began to see ways we could improve our clinical practice, communication, and collaboration with hospital and transplant partners. My contributions enabled me to become the team leader for the Boston area and move to a management position in 2015.

In my current role as Senior Director of Organ Optimization, I oversee an incredible team of clinical donation professionals that steward lifesaving gifts from the point of initial referral to surgical recovery. In my time as director, I have implemented strategies focused on reducing decision-fatigue and multi-tasking, ensuring our clinical staff is positioned to best deliver on our mission every day. My team closely monitors data to ensure we are maximizing every donation, and we regularly meet with our transplant partners to share improvement opportunities and successes. We are projected to have a more than 40% increase in both donors and organs transplanted in just the last three years, and we have worked to make this pace sustainable for our team—hiring and adjusting schedules to enable our staff to perform at their best.

As the daughter-in-law of a three-time kidney recipient, I have experienced firsthand the impact donation and transplant can have not only on the patient but on everyone in their lives. While I believe our system can always be better—as evidenced by our constant growth as a community—I also believe

it takes collaboration, transparency, and accountability to ensure our donors, donor families, and recipients are best served. I have been an advocate for systems-level improvement throughout my career, including in my time as an OPTN Pediatric Transplantation and OPO Committee member, and I look forward to putting my experience and passion to the task of continued improvement for the OPTN and our system as a whole.

***Darren Lahrman, MBA, CPTC, BSRC***

**Executive Director, LifeLink of Florida**

**Biographical Statement.** Darren Lahrman is Executive Director of LifeLink of Florida, where he leads organ donation efforts across west central Florida. He has over 20 years of experience in healthcare, with leadership roles spanning clinical operations, hospital development, donor family care, regulatory compliance, data analytics, and information technology. He is part of the senior leadership team within LifeLink Foundation, the largest provider of organ donation services in the United States when combining its Florida, Georgia, and Puerto Rico service areas.

Prior to joining LifeLink, Darren served as Chief Operating Officer at Life Connection of Ohio and held multiple progressive leadership roles at Nevada Donor Network, including Vice President of Clinical Affairs, Director of Recovery Services, and Manager of Recovery Services. He began his career as an organ recovery coordinator at Indiana Donor Network with a background in respiratory therapy, providing him with deep clinical insight that continues to inform his leadership.

Darren is a Certified Procurement Transplant Coordinator, a published author in *JAMA Network Open*, and a member of the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO), NATCO, and the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE). His career reflects a sustained commitment to improving donation systems and honoring the gift of life.

**Personal Statement.** It is with a profound sense of responsibility that I submit my candidacy for the OPTN Board of Directors. For more than two decades, I have dedicated my career to healthcare, building the teams and systems that make organ donation and transplantation possible. This opportunity aligns with my lifelong commitment to serving those most vulnerable and in need: Our donor heroes, their families, and patients awaiting a life-saving transplant.

My journey began at the bedside as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) and phlebotomist, where I learned firsthand the importance of compassionate, hands-on care. And as a respiratory therapist, I treated critically ill adults, children, and newborns across emergency and intensive care settings. Through these experiences, I developed a deep appreciation for teamwork and the collective effort required to save lives. In the process, I grew to know and care for the many patients with chronic disease who relied on our unshakeable commitment. These early experiences forged my unwavering belief in the power of excellence in healthcare and the sanctity of every patient's story.

My donation career began at the bedside as a clinical transplant coordinator at Indiana Donor Network, where I supported donor families through their most difficult moments and worked shoulder to shoulder with hospital staff and transplant teams to offer hope through organ donation. These experiences forever shaped my perspective on the vital link between frontline care and transplantation,

and the importance of meeting people eye to eye. Every donor, every family, and every gift strengthened my resolve to keep humanity at the heart of our mission.

From there, I embraced progressive leadership roles at Nevada Donor Network and Life Connection of Ohio, gaining comprehensive insight into clinical operations, quality systems, and business intelligence. Today, as Executive Director of LifeLink of Florida, and as a senior leader within LifeLink Foundation, my experience spans donation service areas in Florida, Georgia, and Puerto Rico. This gives me direct insight into the unique challenges and opportunities OPOs face in diverse socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic contexts, and reinforces my belief in the urgent need for a modernized national system that serves all patients and families.

My leadership style is rooted in curiosity, empathy, and a relentless focus on honoring the gift of life. I am committed to driving performance improvement and earning public trust through collaboration, transparency, and accountability. Above all, I believe our commitment to excellence requires us to put donors and patients at the center of every decision. And if given the honor to serve, I will bring energy, integrity, and strategic courage to the OPTN Board. I am committed to accelerating decision-making, leveraging the expertise of our partners, and investing in next-generation systems to advance donation and transplantation with a clear sense of duty to the communities we serve.

Our donors and patients are the reason we exist. I am fully committed to building a system worthy of their trust and sacrifice - a system that honors every gift, serves every patient, and fosters hope for all.

### ***Kevin Lee, MPA***

#### **President and Chief Executive Officer, Mid-America Transplant**

**Biographical Statement.** Since 2015, Kevin Lee has served in several executive roles at Mid-America Transplant (MT) and became president and Chief Executive Officer in 2023. During this time, MT has experienced strong performance as a tier one organ procurement organization. Lee came to the organ donation and transplantation field with more than two decades of leadership experience in healthcare and education.

Lee holds a bachelor's degree from Marquette University and a master's degree from Saint Louis University. He completed the Baldrige Executive Fellows Program in 2022.

Lee is active with several organizations that support donation and transplantation. He currently serves as the Chair of the Missouri Organ Donation Advisory Committee, an ALF board member, a board member of the Baldrige Foundation, and a committee member for Donate Life Illinois.

**Personal Statement.** It is an honor and a privilege to work in the field of organ donation and transplantation, where every decision we make has the potential to save someone's life. Each day, we are driven by two objectives: ending deaths on the transplant waitlist and honoring the legacy of donor heroes. This mission unites all of us, and as the OPTN enters a critical phase of modernization, I am eager to bring strategic leadership to help drive transformative change.

The OPTN modernization efforts have the potential to ignite innovation, efficiency, and collaboration across the system, and it will be critical that the OPTN Board provides strategic leadership to harness this momentum and ensure substantial progress is made. I bring a depth of experience in performance



excellence strategy, gained while serving as a member of the Baldrige Foundation Board of Directors, as a Baldrige Fellow, and on the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program's Board of Examiners, which I believe will be valuable in driving the continuous improvement for the industry.

The organ donation and transplant system is at a crossroads, and the next several years are critical. We must rise to this opportunity to modernize our complex system and advance our shared vision: a future where no one dies waiting, and every donor's gift is maximized with honor and excellence. I look forward to the opportunity to be part of driving this vision and would be grateful for your consideration.

## Transplant Hospital Representative

***Joshua Gossett, DNP, MBA, RN, FACHE***

**Director of the Pediatric Transplant Center, Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford**

**Biographical Statement.** Dr. Gossett currently serves as the Director of the Pediatric Transplant Center at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford. He earned his BS (Biology), MBA, and DNP degrees from the Ohio State University, as well as his BSN from Mt. Carmel College of Nursing. He has earned a black belt in lean/six sigma, as well as various other professional certifications. He is an ACHE Fellow, a committee chair of the IPTA, and a member of the Society for Pediatric Liver Transplantation, ISHLT, and ASAIO.

Dr. Gossett has numerous poster and podium publications including speaking at the American Transplant Congress, the UNOS Transplant Management Forum, and AOPO. He also served as a quality improvement consultant with the Advanced Cardiac Therapies Improving Outcomes Network, as well as the Starzl Network for Excellence in Pediatric Transplant. Dr. Gossett has multiple volunteering roles, including serving on the Medical Advisory Committees of both the Transplant Families organization, as well as the Biliary Atresia Research and Education organization.

**Personal Statement.** I entered the transplant field 25 years ago as a college student working in the clinic for the transplant program at the Ohio State University Medical Center. I was hooked. Since then, I have held numerous roles within and supporting adult and pediatric transplantation as a nurse coordinator, nursing/ administrative leader, doctorate-level professor, and quality improvement specialist, to name a few.

I have obtained degrees in biology, business administration, and a doctorate in nursing practice from the Ohio State University, as well as a bachelor's in nursing from Mt. Carmel College of Nursing. I hold a black belt in Lean and Six Sigma and am a Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality from the National Association for Healthcare Quality, a Certified Clinical Transplant Coordinator from the American Board for Transplant Certification, and an ACHE Fellow.

In my career, I have supported the international Advanced Cardiac Therapies Improving Outcomes Network as their quality improvement consultant and developed the foundation in which they do their improvement work to this day. I also helped to redefine the way that transplant programs look at adverse outcomes through structured categorization and databasing. I presented on this topic at the American Transplant Congress in Chicago in 2017, as well as at the Ohio Solid Organ Transplantation Consortium and NATCO's annual meeting, both in 2017. I have also worked on the design improvement of pediatric quality dashboards, which I presented at the UNOS Transplant Management Forum in 2017.

I continue consulting as a quality improvement expert. I was engaged to record a quality improvement web module for the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition in 2019. I am a quality improvement consultant for the Starzl Network for Excellence in Pediatric Transplantation and chair their Improvement Science Committee. My primary project with this network is to reduce waitlist mortality worldwide for children with liver failure. My abstract was recently accepted for this work at the World Transplant Congress 2025.

At Stanford Medicine Children's Health, my role is overseeing one of the top three busiest pediatric transplant centers in the US. I designed, implemented, and developed an in-house transplant organ procurement department that allows us to have full visibility, management, logistics, and communication for the procurement of organs from both our local OPO as well as others that we work with around the country. This program was able to reduce costs in acquisition fees for organs and tremendously improve the communication and transportation of organs for our pediatric recipients.

I am a passionate advocate for children with organ failure and transplantation. My life's mission is to make systemic and policy driven changes that emphasize the importance of this vulnerable and often under-supported population. I am a Medical Advisory Committee member for both the Transplant Families and BARE organizations. I serve as the co-chair for the Membership and Communications Committee of IPTA. Serving on the OPTN Board of Directors will help propel this goal to the next level.

### Voluntary Health Association Representative

**Annette Needham, DNP, NP-C, NEA-BC, CCTC**

**Transplant Quality Manager, UC Davis Transplant Center; and Secretary, NATCO Board of Directors**

**Biographical Statement.** Annette Needham is a Transplant Quality Manager at UC Davis Transplant Center in California. She is a Certified Family Nurse Practitioner through the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, and a Board-Certified Nurse Executive through American Nurses Credentialing Center, as well as a Certified Clinical Transplant Coordinator. Annette was originally trained and licensed as a Registered General Nurse in the United Kingdom and emigrated to the United States in 1997. She obtained her bachelor's in nursing, followed by master's in nursing in Orlando, FL, and her Doctor of Nursing Practice at George Washington University. She was proud to become an American citizen 20 years ago. Annette serves on the NATCO Executive Board, teaches as co-faculty for their CCTC® review course, and is on various committees at UC Davis Health. Outside of work, Annette enjoys spending time with her husband and three Bernese Mountain dogs, as well as participating in and volunteering at various endurance events.

**Personal Statement.** My transplant journey began many years ago as a bedside nurse on the transplant floor in one of my first jobs in the United States. I discovered a passion for transplantation and was determined to make a difference in my work. Over the years, I have had the privilege to work as a transplant and living donor coordinator, transplant nurse practitioner, and transplant administrator in three different transplant centers, including UCLA, Advent Health Orlando, and UC Davis.

In my current position of Transplant Quality Manager, I administer all parts of our quality and improvement program, maintain compliance with regulations, manage policies, oversee data and research, and provide excellent clinical leadership to our teams. I also facilitate our Leading an Empowered Organization (LEO) training in relationship-based care at UC Davis. I have led both CMS and OPTN audits on our liver and kidney programs and developed all policies/educational material for a new heart transplant program.

My voluntary leadership roles include being a member of the OPTN Living Donor Committee in 2007, participating in nationwide collaboratives, such as the ESRD Treatment Choice Learning Collaborative

(ETCLC) and Kidney Care Partners (KCP), and teaching future coordinators through certification program preparatory courses for the past several years. I am also an Executive Board Member (Secretary) with NATCO.

My experience over the past 27 years shows dedication to the field of transplantation, not just in my paid work, but also in my volunteer activities. As I focus on opportunities to serve our transplant community, I like to remember one of our guiding principles at UC Davis, which is that “our patients and people are at the center of everything we do.” I applaud the OPTN for the bold moves with the OPTN Modernization Initiative to create a better system for both transplant professionals and transplant patients.

I appreciate the opportunity to apply to serve on the OPTN Board of Directors to continue working on the modernization of our donation and transplantation system. I believe that my diverse transplant experience and unique insights will contribute to the OPTN mission to increase opportunities for transplants, optimize organ use, enhance efficiency, and support modernization initiatives.

## Histocompatibility Representative

***Cathi Murphey, PhD, MS***

**Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics Laboratory Director, Southwest Immunodiagnostics, Inc.**

**Biographical and Personal Statement.** I bring over 40 years of experience in histocompatibility and immunogenetics, combining deep scientific expertise with a long-standing commitment to service in the transplant community. I currently serve as the HLA Laboratory Director at Southwest Immunodiagnostics, Inc. in San Antonio, Texas.

I earned my BA in Biology from the University of Texas at Austin, followed by both a Master of Science in Biology and a PhD in Cellular and Molecular Biology from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Throughout my career, I have been a passionate advocate for advancing the science and standards of histocompatibility. I have held numerous leadership roles within ASHI, where I currently serve as President.

My involvement with the OPTN communities is extensive. From 2011 to 2015, I represented Region 4 on the OPTN Histocompatibility Committee. I later served as Vice Chair (2016–2018) and then Chair of the same committee. My contributions extend to the OPTN Kidney Paired Donation (KPD) Subcommittee, the OPTN Advisory Committee for KPD, and the Fiscal Impact Committee.

I played a pivotal role in developing and implementing the updated cPRA calculator, a key tool in improving equity in transplant access. More recently, I have focused on strategies to expand access to kidney transplantation, including efforts to increase the use of ABO A2 donors for patients with blood types O and B.

I view the current OPTN modernization efforts as both a challenge and a critical opportunity to improve transparency, efficiency, and equity across the transplant system. With my blend of scientific acumen and collaborative leadership, I am committed to supporting policies that enhance outcomes for patients and the broader transplant community.

## Non-Transplant Professional Representatives

### ***Jerold Mande, MPH***

**Chief Executive Officer of Nourish Science, Adjunct Professor of Nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University; guided the development of the National Organ Transplant Act (NOTA) as a legislative assistant in the U.S. House and Senate**

**Biographical Statement.** Jerold Mande is the Chief Executive Officer of Nourish Science; Adjunct Professor of Nutrition, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health; and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University.

Mr. Mande has a wealth of expertise and experience in national public health policy and executive leadership. He served in senior policymaking positions for three presidents at FDA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the White House, helping lead landmark public health initiatives. He managed food safety and nutrition at USDA for President Obama. He helped shape national policy on nutrition, food safety, and tobacco at FDA for President Clinton. He also served on the White House staff as a health policy advisor and was deputy administrator of OSHA. During the George H.W. Bush administration he led the graphic design of the iconic Nutrition Facts label at FDA, for which he received the Presidential Design Award.

Mr. Mande began his career as a legislative assistant for Al Gore in the House and Senate, managing Gore's health and environment agenda, and helping Gore write the nation's organ donation and transplantation laws.

Prior to his current academic appointments, he served on the faculty at the Tufts, Friedman School of Nutrition and Yale School of Medicine.

**Personal Statement.** The OPTN is vitally important in serving donors, the patients on the organ waiting list, their families, and the health care professionals who rely on it to produce an effective transplant system. As someone who guided the development of the National Organ Transplant Act (NOTA) and has served in numerous executive-level health policy roles, I would be honored to have the opportunity to serve as an OPTN Board member. I believe that working together, we have a generational opportunity to ensure that the organ donation and transplant system reaches ever higher levels of excellence, innovation, and patient care.

I am the Chief Executive Officer of Nourish Science; Adjunct Professor of Nutrition at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health; and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University.

I was intimately involved in the creation of the national organ donation program as a legislative assistant for Al Gore in the U.S. House and Senate, where I managed Gore's health agenda and helped him investigate and write the nation's organ donation and transplantation laws. It was a great privilege to work with experts, luminaries in the field, and people often desperately seeking an organ to help establish this lifesaving program.

Subsequently, my professional focus turned to national public health and food policy. I have served in senior policymaking positions for three U.S. presidents at the FDA, OSHA, USDA, and the White House, helping lead landmark public health initiatives. I was appointed by President Obama as USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety, and later moved to USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, where I spent six years working to improve the health outcomes of the nation's \$100 billion investment in 15 nutrition programs.

During President Clinton's administration, I was Senior Advisor to the FDA commissioner helping lead our tobacco investigation and rulemaking, served on the White House staff as a health policy advisor, and served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Occupational Health at the Department of Labor. During the George H.W. Bush administration, I led the graphic design of the iconic Nutrition Facts label at FDA, for which I received the Presidential Design Award.

I earned a Master of Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Bachelor of Science in nutritional science from the University of Connecticut. Prior to my current academic appointments, I served on the faculty at the Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and Yale School of Medicine.

Throughout my career in both government and academia, my passion for organ donation and transplantation has never wavered, and I believe now is an exceptional opportunity for me to re-engage formally. The organ donation system in America is at an important inflection point under renewed Congressional scrutiny, and I believe I am uniquely positioned to help re-ground us in the original ideals of NOTA, while working in close partnership with the next generation of innovators who can carry us all into the future.

**Mary E. Homan, DrPH, MA, MSCHE**

**Mountain Region Vice President of Theology and Ethics, CommonSpirit Health**

**Biographical Statement.** Mary E. Homan, DrPH, MA, MSCHE serves as the Mountain Region vice president of theology and ethics for CommonSpirit Health. Mary's responsibilities include organizational and clinical ethics with an emphasis on discernment, formation, governance, and education, as well as development of ethics policies and processes. Mary maintains an adjunct associate professor role in the department of community Health at the Medical College of Wisconsin and had a permanent faculty role in the Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities before joining Providence as the Puget Sound senior director of ethics during the height of COVID-19. Mary has held clinical ethics roles with Mercy and SCL Health as well as community-engaged research roles with Saint Louis University and the Missouri Institute of Mental Health. Mary has published in *The Journal of Heart and Lung Transplantation*, *The American Journal of Transplantation*, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, *Journal of Healthcare Management*, *Public Health Ethics*, *The Journal of Medicine & Philosophy*, *HealthCare Ethics USA*, *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, and *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics*. Homan earned degrees at Saint Louis University, Aquinas Institute of Theology, Creighton University and the University of Oklahoma. She lives in Milwaukee, WI.

**Personal Statement.** I am so excited about the possibility to serve the OPTN and influence the important work in organ transplantation. I am the vice president of theology and ethics at the largest nonprofit healthcare organization in the United States, with over 2,200 care sites (140+ hospitals) in 24 states.

Three of the active transplant hospitals are in our health system, as well as a donor care unit and a procurement suite on one of our campuses. We engage with almost all of the OPOs across the United States, and I see my potential role with OPTN as bringing an important stakeholder to the conversation to help modernize and provide transparency in the organ transplantation process.

As a bioethicist for over 15 years, I have interfaced routinely with OPOs, donors, and hospitals in academic settings, community hospitals, and at a children's hospital where I have provided clinical and organizational ethics consultation. I have seen the consequences of effective and compassionate donation requests and equally have dealt with those adverse consequences when there is family disagreement with a donor's wishes. My unique perspective as a clinical ethicist will be helpful to the OPTN Board of Directors to better serve the interests of patients and families.

As a community engaged researcher, I have heard first-hand the mistrust of the organ donation process in communities who have felt overstudied and over-researched but under-served and under-treated for chronic conditions resulting in a need for organ transplantation. I served on a NIH workshop in March 2023 examining xenotransplantation and donation after cardiac death with numerous publications resulting from that workshop identifying the current knowledge gaps and research opportunities in the scientific, conceptual, and ethical understanding of organ donation after the circulatory determination of death and its technologies such as TA-NRP. My knowledge and experience in research ethics will also be an asset.

Another unique skill set I bring is from my doctoral studies in health administration where I focused my dissertation research not only on patient outcomes but also conducted an economic evaluation. My expertise in reading budgets (and having to write many for grant funding proposals!) will hopefully be an asset to the board of directors. I also bring strong leadership formation and governance development skills from the numerous in-kind projects I have provided over the years as non-profits looked to me for guidance in those areas.

In conclusion, I envision a more transparent, just, and equitable transplant process for all those who are hoping for this life-saving gift as well as improving the donation process to increase the number of donors from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities. I envision a board of directors that listens to the concerns vulnerable communities raise as well as those working with patients at the bedside following a devastating prognosis. I want to help with the commitment to a modernized, transparent, and innovative organ procurement transplant network operating at its full potential, avoiding unnecessary deaths or delays.



## Regional Councillors

### **Region 1 Councillor: Nahel Elias, MD**

#### **Medical Director for Quality, Division of Transplantation, Massachusetts General Hospital**

**Biographical Statement.** Dr. Nahel Elias is a nationally recognized kidney, liver, and pancreas transplant surgeon. He graduated from the University of Damascus/Faculty of Medicine, completed research fellowship at McGill University (Montreal), surgical residency at the North Oakland Medical Center/Wayne State University (Michigan) in 2002, and Transplant Surgery Fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH)/Harvard University in 2004 before joining the faculty.

Dr. Elias brings over two decades of leadership experience to this role, including the MGH Kidney Transplant surgical directorship and the medical directorship of quality for transplant surgery. He fostered the kidney transplant program growth and improved equity through collaborative, multidisciplinary care and quality assurance and performance improvement focus, as well as grant-funded improvement of care transitions related work. His innovative work expanded the donor pool providing organ shortage solutions and options to patients awaiting transplantation. A couple examples were a collaborative project with the intensive care units, operating room, and the New England Organ Bank on DCD expansion in Region 1 going back 20 years, and most recently performing the first clinical porcine kidney xenotransplant in a living human.

Nationally, Dr. Elias serves on the OPTN MPSC and Living Donor Committee, which he chaired until 2024, and on the ASTS NSQIP Steering and Business Practice Committees.

**Personal Statement.** I am honored to be a candidate for the OPTN Board of Directors. I seek your support as a dedicated advocate for the world's best organ transplantation system, committed to addressing its challenges and optimistic about our ability to overcome them.

I graduated from the University of Damascus Faculty of Medicine and completed a research fellowship at McGill University's transplant surgery research laboratory. Following my general surgery residency and abdominal transplant surgery fellowship, I joined the faculty at MGH. Currently, I serve as the Surgical Director of Renal Transplantation and the Medical Director for Quality. I am privileged to practice transplant surgery and have a strong academic interest in clinical transplantation, expanding the donor pool (including xenotransplantation), and improving candidates' access to transplantation. I have authored over 110 scientific manuscripts.

I have volunteered on OPTN committees for about a decade, as well as on ASTS and AST committees. I chaired the OPTN Living Donor Committee (2022–2024) and currently serve as *ex officio* on it, and as a "member-at-large" on the MPSC, participating in multiple working groups within these committees.

Transplantation is unique in its limitation to provide the best-known care to every patient in need, primarily due to organ supply constraints. This supply depends on the generosity of deceased and living donors, the efficiency of OPOs, and the processes at transplant centers. Recent advancements in organ preservation and function, particularly from expanded criteria donors, and algorithms for optimizing allocation, including paired donation, have increased the available organ pool. However, we still haven't met the current demand, let alone the total need if every organ failure patient had access to transplantation.

Eliminating these gaps should be the top priority for the OPTN Board. Leveraging these technologies, enhancing implementation processes, and improving access to transplantation are crucial tasks for the Board, especially under the new structure of OPTN contracts with multiple contractors. The new Board must ensure that contractors consistently support the community, its needs, the OPTN infrastructure, and its priorities to best serve our patients and the community.

The OPTN's public-private partnership with multiple stakeholders is a model for patient service organizations, particularly in serving patients with organ failure. Its leadership and Board should ensure that patients' and communities' voices are heard and understood, discussions are fact-based, and patients' needs are always prioritized through collaboration, commitment to listening, full transparency, and bidirectional trust with the community.

I am uniquely positioned as an ideal Board candidate, ready to leverage my experience, collaborative spirit, enthusiasm, positive leadership style, and commitment to the system and community. I look forward to contributing to the advancement of the best organ transplantation system and enhancing the lives and livelihoods of patients awaiting transplantation.

***Region 2 Councillor: Kenneth Chavin, MD, MBA, PhD***

**Director of Abdominal Organ Transplant, Temple University Health System**

**Biographical Statement.** I am a clinically active abdominal transplant surgeon and am currently Professor and Vice Chair of Research at the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University. I trained in General Surgery at the Medical University of South Carolina and Transplant Surgery at Johns Hopkins. I have held faculty positions at Johns Hopkins University, the Medical University of South Carolina, and Case Western Reserve prior to assuming my current position in 2022. I have held leadership positions including Institute Director and Division Chief and served as the primary surgeon for living donor, kidney, pancreas, and liver transplants in my programs. I have been active in several OPOs and currently am on the Medical Advisory Board for Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia. My clinical expertise includes multi-organ transplantation, laparoscopic donor nephrectomy, and treatment options for patients with nutcracker vein phenomenon, which includes the option of therapeutic nephrectomy with altruistic donation.

**Personal Statement.** I have an interest in clinical and translational research with experience in cell transplantation for the treatment of diabetes and new immunosuppressive agents, as well as methods of improving organ preservation and utilization specifically related to hepatic steatosis relating to organ availability in liver transplantation, as well as basic science research into the mechanisms of development of hepatic steatosis and inflammation.

I have been an active member of the ASTS and the OPTN, serving on many committees throughout my career. This is a critical time for transplantation in the United States and it is important to have leadership experience to effect changes that will be lasting and transformative to help achieve the maximum benefit of transplantation for all.

***Region 3 Councillor: Ari Cohen, MD, MBA***

**Director, Ochsner Transplant Institute, and Director of Transplant Research and Surgical Director, Liver Transplant Section, Ochsner Health System**

**Biographical Statement.** In 1992, I received my medical degree from the University of Manitoba. There, I also finished my training in general surgery, and in 1997, I earned my Master of Science in Surgery. I started training as an ASTS fellow in abdominal transplant surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, in 1998, and I finished my training there in 2001.

Today, I am the Director of Ochsner Transplant Institute and Director of Transplant Research at Ochsner Clinic Foundation in New Orleans. I am also a Professor of Surgery at both Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center and The University of Queensland School of Medicine. I began my career at Ochsner in 2002. From 2010 to 2019, I helped create and run the country's largest liver transplant program. As I have progressed in my career, my administrative and financial responsibilities have expanded across various roles. Acknowledging the importance of further education, I completed my master's in business administration in 2023. Apart from my administrative responsibilities, I still work as a transplant surgeon and clinical physician.

After 12 years as Board President, I am currently serving as Past Board President for the Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency in 2025. In 2018, we completed the construction of a stand-alone donor care center. In 2023, I led this agency to restructure its leadership. These changes allowed LOPA to change from a Tier 3 organization to a Tier 1 rating in a single year. These changes in donation and transplant rates have continued into 2025.

**Personal Statement.** While it is natural to hold differing opinions on how ethical and legal principles should shape organ allocation policies, there's a shared understanding at the core of our work: serving individuals with organ failure is our ultimate responsibility. The OPTN's role is inherently complex and often contentious. Even so, its leadership bears a clear duty—to actively listen to and consider all viewpoints. Meaningful, evidence-driven dialogue that challenges assumptions is essential. Above all, these conversations must remain centered on what best serves our patients. The most significant and pressing challenges include long wait times, unequal access, and systemic inefficiencies. To overcome these obstacles, decisive action and a collective commitment to progress are essential.

I am an excellent choice for the OPTN Board because I bring a proven ability to identify thoughtful, practical solutions to complex challenges. I approach each issue with a clear, solution-oriented mindset, always prioritizing both the integrity of the system and the well-being of those it serves. My commitment is to help move the network forward with strength and purpose—without disrupting the current volume of transplants or compromising the position of those already waiting. I believe progress should be both compassionate and strategic, and I am ready to contribute to a future that is equitable, efficient, and grounded in care.

***Region 4 Councillor: Ryan Davies, MD***

**Clinical Director of Pediatric Heart Transplantation and Mechanical Circulatory Support, and Interim Chief of Pediatric Solid Organ Transplantation, UT Southwestern Medical Center/Children's Medical Center**

**Biographical Statement.** Dr. Ryan R. Davies is a Professor and Surgical Director of Pediatric Heart Transplant and Mechanical Circulatory Support at UT Southwestern Medical Center/Children's Medical Center in Dallas, TX, where he also is the interim leader of the Pediatric Solid Organ Transplant Program. Dr. Davies is a graduate of Yale University School of Medicine and has dedicated a significant portion of his career to improving outcomes in organ transplantation.

A leader in the field, Dr. Davies has been actively involved with the OPTN. He previously served as Chair of the OPTN Thoracic Organ Transplantation Committee and as a member of multiple OPTN committees and workgroups. This experience has provided him with a unique perspective on organ allocation policy and the challenges facing patients awaiting transplantation. His research interests include optimizing donor organ utilization, improving access to transplantation for children, and long-term outcomes following transplantation. He has been honored with awards such as the UT Southwestern Leaders in Clinical Excellence Program Development Award for leadership of the heart transplant program and is widely published in the field.

**Personal Statement.** It has been the privilege of my career to care for children facing some of the most complex cardiac conditions—patients for whom heart transplantation is often the only hope. As a congenital cardiac surgeon and transplant physician, I have witnessed both the extraordinary success stories and the heartbreaking realities of a system still marked by inequities in access and underutilization of donor organs. I am committed to helping build a transplant system where every candidate—regardless of age, geography, or background—has a fair opportunity to receive a life-saving organ, and where every viable donation is used to its fullest potential.

I currently serve as Professor of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center and Director of Pediatric Heart Transplantation and Mechanical Circulatory Support at Children's Health in Dallas. I also serve as the Interim Chief of the Pediatric Solid Organ Transplant Program, working across heart, liver, and kidney transplant teams to improve integration and outcomes. My clinical work focuses on the care of children with advanced heart failure and congenital heart disease, including those supported with mechanical circulatory devices. My academic interests center on outcomes-based research and national data analysis, with over 130 peer-reviewed publications on pediatric and congenital cardiac surgery and transplantation.

I have had the honor of serving in multiple leadership roles within the OPTN. I was Chair of the Thoracic Organ Transplantation Committee from 2018–2020 and Vice Chair prior to that. I also served as Region 2 Representative and as the Thoracic Committee representative to the Policy Oversight Committee. My OPTN experience spans critical national initiatives, including the Ad Hoc Geography Committee, Strategic Planning Collaborative, and Systems Performance Metrics Summit. I have also contributed to the Lung Continuous Distribution Workgroup and participated as an ex-officio member of both the Heart and Lung Committees. Across these roles, my focus has been on developing equitable allocation policies,

optimizing donor organ utilization, and improving national transplant performance through thoughtful, data-informed policy.

These experiences have given me a comprehensive understanding of the transplant system's complexity and the importance of broad stakeholder collaboration. If elected to the OPTN Board of Directors, I will bring a perspective grounded in clinical care, data-driven analysis, and a deep belief in the need for continual system improvement.

My priority will be to advocate for policies that increase access to transplantation and ensure that we use every available donor organ wisely and justly. We owe it to our patients—and to the families who give the gift of life—to build a system that is both fair and effective. I would be honored to serve and to help guide the next chapter of the OPTN's essential work.

***Region 5 Councillor: Andrew M. Courtwright, MD, PhD***

**Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Department of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, and Adjunct Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Utah**

**Biographical Statement.** Andrew M. Courtwright, MD, PhD, is a transplant pulmonologist and clinical ethicist joining the University of Utah as an Associate Professor of Medicine and Adjunct Associate Professor of Philosophy. He completed his MD and PhD in philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, followed by clinical training at Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital, and the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Courtwright's academic work has focused on three areas: the care of highly sensitized lung transplant candidates, pre- and post-transplant considerations for patients with telomere biology disorders and advanced lung disease, and the impact of allocation policy changes on lung transplant program behavior. He has also served on the ISHLT Ethics Committee, chaired the AST Conflict of Interest Committee, and represented Region 2 on the OPTN Ethics Committee. As a non-directed kidney donor, Dr. Courtwright remains committed to ensuring that transplant policy is supported by clinical evidence and adheres to foundational ethical principles.

**Personal Statement.** As a transplant pulmonologist, clinical ethicist, and non-directed kidney donor, I have developed a unique perspective on organ transplantation that reflects the responsibilities of a modern OPTN board. After completing my PhD in philosophy and MD at UNC Chapel Hill, I trained at Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital, and the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, where I served as a transplant pulmonologist for eight years. Alongside my clinical work, I have remained deeply engaged in transplant ethics. I have led a hospital ethics consult service; contributed to the International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation Ethics Committee position statements on donation after circulatory death and xenotransplantation; and collaborated on position papers involving normothermic regional perfusion and out-of-sequence allocation as a member of the OPTN Ethics Committee. I also chaired the AST Conflict of Interest Committee, navigating policy revisions around disclosable relationships, disqualifying conflicts, and conflict of interest management mechanisms.

In 2024, I became a non-directed living kidney donor. Based on my experience trying to match highly sensitized lung transplant candidates, I requested that my kidney be allocated to a high PRA patient, if possible. I was fortunate to initiate a five-person paired exchange that included several sensitized recipients. I remain profoundly grateful to my coordinator and the transplant team. Through the donor

process and recovery, I felt, in a small way, the vulnerability of patients and the extraordinary faith they place in us. This experience has enhanced my ability to support patients and their families in my own practice and reinforced the importance of having a system that is worthy of patient trust.

Ultimately, I believe the OPTN Board bears responsibility not only for promoting transplant growth but for upholding ethical standards across all aspects of allocation and governance. Having experienced the organ transplant network as a clinician, ethicist, and donor, I would like to use my skills in support of OPTN Modernization through Board service.

***Region 6 Councillor: Gina-Marie Barletta, MD***

**Medical Director, Pediatric Kidney Transplantation, and Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Pediatric Nephrology, Oregon Health & Science University**

**Biographical Statement.** *Education & Training.* Arizona State University, Honors College (Undergraduate); University of Arizona (Medical School); University of Arizona; University of Michigan (Pediatric Nephrology Fellowship)

After completing fellowship in pediatric nephrology at the University of Michigan in 2003, Dr. Barletta joined Helen DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids, MI, playing a pivotal role in establishing their Pediatric Kidney Transplant Program and served as Medical Director from 2005 to 2010. She later transitioned to Phoenix Children's Hospital, serving as Medical Director of Pediatric Kidney Transplant from 2015 to 2024. She most recently joined Oregon Health & Science University in April 2024 and currently serves as Medical Director of Pediatric Kidney Transplantation. Dr. Barletta also holds the position of Secretary of ASPN.

**Personal Statement.** Drawing upon over two decades of leadership and dedicated service in pediatric kidney transplantation, my experiences have deeply influenced and strengthened my commitment to the transplant community. Caring for so many children and their families has not only reinforced my dedication to improving patient outcomes but has also sparked my interest in national efforts to enhance kidney health in children. Through advocacy, education, clinical care, and collaborative initiatives, I strive to make a meaningful impact both locally and nationally.

After completing my fellowship in pediatric nephrology at the University of Michigan, I joined Helen DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I played a pivotal role in establishing their Pediatric Kidney Transplant Program and served as the Medical Director from 2005 to 2010. I later transitioned to Phoenix Children's Hospital, where I led as Medical Director of Pediatric Kidney Transplant from 2015 to 2024. Most recently, I joined Oregon Health & Science University in April 2024, where I now serve as Medical Director of Pediatric Kidney Transplantation. In each role, I have collaborated closely with multidisciplinary teams, patients, and families to deliver the highest standards of care and innovation in kidney transplantation.

Beyond my institutional leadership, I have been deeply committed to advancing the field at a national level. I currently serve as Secretary of the American Society of Pediatric Nephrology, a role that will matriculate to President over the next five years. Additionally, I have contributed my expertise in financial stewardship and organizational strategy through service as Secretary-Treasurer of the Improving Renal Outcomes Collaborative and as a member of the National Kidney Foundation of Arizona



Board of Directors. My involvement on these boards has included securing and allocating funding to successfully execute community initiatives aimed at improving outcomes and patient support.

My career reflects a passion for driving quality improvement, fostering collaborative teamwork, and supporting the long-term well-being of transplant patients and their families. I bring a wealth of organizational, analytical, and communication skills that I am eager to apply to this endeavor to ensure success and equity.

Thank you for considering my nomination for this opportunity to contribute meaningfully to our shared mission of excellence and equity for successful transplantation and I would like to ensure that pediatric transplant patients are represented.

***Region 7 Councillor: Reynold Lopez-Soler, MD, PhD***

**Professor of Surgery, Division of Transplant, Loyola University Medical Center, and Section Chief of Renal Transplant, Edward Hines Jr. VA Medical Center**

**Biographical Statement.** My current clinical position allows me to work in two distinct environments; I am a Professor of Surgery in the Division of Transplantation at Loyola University Medical Center and the Section Chief of Renal Transplant at the Hines VA Medical Center. The initial reason for my hire in Chicago was to start and develop the program at Hines. At the time, the program did not exist. In the last four years, we have grown from nothing to the biggest transplant program in the VA system, performing approximately 100 transplants/year. These accomplishments highlight what transplant can and should be: a “Total Team Sport.” Every aspect of the Hines VA Hospital came together to make this reality happen even in the challenges of COVID and changing politics. This has been the best training one could receive to understand the challenges that the OPTN Board will face in the coming years.

**Personal Statement.** I believe that transplantation provides an incredibly fertile ground for research endeavors. I have developed a basic science research programs at Loyola focused on the biological changes leading to renal fibrosis post-transplant, and at Hines focused on Hepatitis B/C transplants, elderly transplantation, frailty assessment, and access to transplant for veterans.

Transplant policy is an important component that allows and improves transplant access for all patients. I am a member of the Medical Advisory Board of the local OPO, Gift of Hope, as well as have been a member of the Minority Affairs committee of the OPTN, ASTS, and the Association of VA Surgeons (AVAS). However, it is my work as the current chair of Transplant Surgery Advisory Board for the National Surgery Office that has allowed me to influence and direct transplant policy for all VA transplantation. In this capacity, I have been in proximity with legislators as well as the VA Secretary’s Office as transplant policy has been developed for not only VA, but nationally.

We have a responsibility to train the next generation of physicians and surgeons and therefore I am actively involved in Resident and Fellow teaching/training at Loyola and Hies VA and am also the Assistant Director of the MD/PhD program at Loyola. This experience has been invaluable in not only preparing the next generation of doctors, educators, and scientists, but also honing the way in which we talk about and teach the art and medicine of transplant.

This is a critical time for transplantation. In the next 5-10 years, policy, scientific, and clinical changes will undoubtedly reshape the face of what we do. The OPTN Board stands at the nexus of this change. I see



the OPTN Board as the way to combine the art of transplant, the rapid progress of information and scientific discovery, and the changing policy with all the strong winds that drive it with the equipoise and compassion needed to continue providing not only the best care but best outcomes for our patients. I look forward to being part of the team as we move into the future.

***Region 8 Councillor: Mark Wakefield, MD***

**Director and Primary Surgeon of Renal Transplant Program, University of Missouri Health Care**

**Biographical Statement.** I am the director of the renal transplant program at the University of Missouri Health Care. I have endeavored to improve organ donation and transplantation by representing all and especially the vulnerable rural and midwestern donors and patients with end stage organ disease. Not naive to the challenges that face organ donation and transplantation, I will be a deliberative, optimistic, and collaborative member of the committee, seeking to represent the entirety of transplant community.

**Personal Statement.** I am experienced and qualified to be a director on the OPTN Board. Locally, I have assisted with the successful adoption of circulatory of death donor program and normothermic regional perfusion at our donor hospital while partnering with Midwest Transplant Network. I am familiar with the valuable efforts of the OPTN committee system, having served on operation and safety committee, the vascularized composite allograft committees, and most recently membership and professional standards committee.

I will serve with integrity. The OPTN has an opportunity to enhance its role in improving and saving lives through organ donation and transplantation. The modernization opportunity continues the transformation of the wonder of organ transplantation, though we must continue balancing justice and utility. The OPTN and its Board of Directors must ensure trust during modernization to ensure the best utilization of cherished gifts as we increase the number of transplants. I will strive to be an excellent board member and represent all communities.

***Region 9 Councillor: Meelie DebRoy, MD***

**Section Chief, Kidney Transplant, Department of Surgery, Westchester Medical Center**

**Biographical Statement.** I am honored to submit my candidacy for the OPTN Board of Directors. With a career devoted to advancing equity, ethics and innovation in healthcare, I bring a deep commitment to improving our nation's transplantation system for the benefit of all patients in need.

I completed my surgical residency at Rutgers University in New Jersey and subsequently completed my Transplant Surgery Fellowship at the University of Michigan. Early in my career, I witnessed firsthand the impact that a group of dedicated volunteers could bring about with thoughtful discussion and access to data. Having previously served the OPTN in numerous capacities such as the Minority Affairs Committee (Chair), Simultaneous Liver-Kidney Allocation working group, Pediatrics Committee, I have seen the profound impact that timely and equitable transplantation can have—not only on individual patients, but on entire families and communities.

**Personal Statement.** To be able to witness the miracle of transplantation on an almost daily basis is a true privilege. We have a responsibility to be judicious stewards of a scarce resource while also promoting transparency, reducing disparities in access to transplantation and fostering collaboration

among all stakeholders. This is truly a transformational time for the OPTN. If elected, I will prioritize policy initiatives that enhance donor registration, improve organ utilization and ensure that every patient—regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or geography—has a fair chance at life-saving care.

Serving on the OPTN Board is both a profound responsibility and an extraordinary opportunity to contribute to meaningful, lasting improvements in the health of patients in need. We have an obligation to restore public trust in the processes and policies that govern transplantation in our country. I am eager to bring my experience, perspective, and dedication to support the mission of this transformed OPTN and to help guide our national system with compassion, accountability and integrity.

The patients at the center of our efforts deserve no less.

***Region 10 Councillor: Austin Schenk, MD, PhD, FACS***

*Austin Schenk, MD, PhD, FACS, will assume the role of Region 10 Councillor because the current Region 10 Councillor, John C. Magee, MD, was elected as President of the OPTN Board of Directors.*

**Quality and Patient Safety Officer, Comprehensive Transplant Center, and Associate Professor of Surgery, Division of Transplantation Surgery, Ohio State University**

**Biographical Statement.** Dr. Schenk graduated from Dartmouth College in 2000 with a degree in bioinorganic chemistry. After two years of research, including a Cancer Research Training Award Fellowship at the NIH, he completed the Medical Scientist Training Program at Case Western Reserve University earning his MD as well as his PhD in transplantation immunology. He went on to complete general surgery residence at Dartmouth's Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital and then completed the abdominal transplant surgery fellowship at Emory University. He is currently an associate professor of surgery at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. Dr. Schenk maintains an active surgical practice including liver, kidney and pancreas transplantation. He directs a transplantation immunobiology laboratory and is an adjunct professor in the division of microbiology, immunology and infection. He is an MPI on R01-funded research investigating access to transplant for patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and he currently serves as the Quality and Patient Safety Officer for the Comprehensive Transplant Center at Ohio State.

**Personal Statement.** Transplantation has been at the center of my professional life since 2002. My first exposure to the field was a research opportunity in bone marrow transplantation, and I was later exposed to solid organ transplant as well as transplant surgery and medicine. I cherish our field and I am devoted to transplant surgery, science, policy, and most importantly to our patients and donors. Sweeping changes are happening in our field. New organ preservation technologies, progress in xenotransplantation, allocation policy changes, payment and regulatory restructuring, and modernization of the OPTN are just several examples. Rapid progress is exciting and offers tremendous promise for our patients, but every step forward requires forethought. While strategizing to maximize lives saved through organ transplantation the OPTN must also anticipate behavioral responses to policy change. The path forward must be data-driven, transparent, innovative, and must preserve public trust in our system. We must collectively solve our own problems before solutions are provided to us. My experiences as a surgeon, basic scientist, health services researcher, and my oversight responsibilities for quality within the transplant program at Ohio State give me a well-rounded perspective on strengths and weaknesses within the current system. If selected to serve as an Associate Regional Councillor for

the OPTN I will work creatively and tirelessly to help our field adapt and evolve and I will use the best interests of our recipients and donors as a guiding compass.

***Region 11 Councillor: Vincent Casingal, MD***

**Chief, Division of Abdominal Transplant, and Surgical Director, Adult and Pediatric Kidney Transplant, Atrium Health-Carolinas Medical Center**

**Biographical and Personal Statement.** As a transplant surgeon caring for a critically ill patient, the best course of action for a single patient is usually obvious: a low-risk organ, expertly procured and promptly transplanted. In those moments, clinical urgency and ethical clarity tend to align. As a local procurement surgeon helping an OPO place higher-risk organs, the situation becomes more challenging. It takes sound judgment, clear communication, and attention to clinical nuance to ensure successful placement. As a volunteer contributing to OPTN policy, the path forward becomes more complex, and decision-making becomes less obvious.

Through my work with the OPTN and ASTS, I have gained a deeper understanding of the broader challenges we face as a community. These conversations highlight just how difficult it is to shape policies that balance outcomes, donor intent, logistics, financial realities, and the goal of maximizing organ use. At the same time, we must hold fast to equity and fairness—principles that demand collaboration, consensus, and a long-term view.

In my role as Chief of the Division of Abdominal Transplant at Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center, I work across pediatric and adult kidney and liver transplantation, living kidney donation, and organ procurement. Every day, I see just how complex and high-stakes this field is—not only for our patients and their families, but for the entire transplant community.

Serving on the OPTN Board would be a meaningful opportunity to help shape a system that's transparent, inclusive, and forward-thinking. We need to bring together diverse voices—surgeons, physicians, coordinators, ethicists, donor families, and patients—and work toward common goals. Innovation must be paired with equity, and outcomes with access.

Our field is not static. We are always learning—both from what goes well and from where we fall short. Policy should reflect that same mindset. It should evolve, guided by data, grounded in experience, and committed to continuous improvement.

Ultimately, this work must be rooted in humility and purpose. I would be honored to bring my clinical, surgical, and policy experience to the Board, and to contribute to the OPTN's mission of expanding access, improving outcomes, and building a system that serves patients and families with integrity, compassion, and excellence.