

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Kathy Castor

Hearing on “A Year Removed: Oversight of Securing the U.S. Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network Act Implementation”

September 11, 2024

The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, or OPTN, is the nationwide system coordinating the logistics of all organ donations and transplants in the United States. 46,000 transplants were performed in 2023, but more than 100,000 patients are currently on the waiting list. To save as many lives as possible, the system must be both efficient and equitable.

A single contractor – UNOS – has managed the entire OPTN system since its inception. We’ve seen evidence of the often-dangerous consequences of this 40-year monopoly uncovered by Federal audits, congressional investigations, and public reporting. Tragically, a lack of competition and accountability appears to have eliminated any incentive for UNOS to improve and update its woefully inadequate operations. That must change.

Last year, Democrats and Republicans from this Committee championed a bill, which President Biden signed into law, to reform that system. That new law requires a competitive contracting process for the separate components of OPTN, which will lead to competent contractors with appropriate expertise at every level.

At the same time, the Health Resources and Services Administration, or HRSA, is reestablishing its oversight authority through its own Modernization Initiative, which is backed by additional authorities and increased funding from last year’s bipartisan reform legislation.

According to HRSA, there are about 400 members of the OPTN, including transplant centers, organ procurement organizations that currently handle the logistics of matching and transporting donated organs for transplant, and labs. I represent Tampa General Hospital, which is the fourth largest transplant center by volume in the nation. They serve some of our sickest neighbors and have successfully performed some of the most complex liver and kidney transplants in Florida for fifty years. They work hand-in-glove with LifeLink of Florida, an organ procurement organization serving west and southwest Florida that has increased organ donors and transplants over the last five years.

Together, the OPTN members are responsible for coordinating the many intricate steps to procure donated organs and safely deliver them to a transplant center and a waiting patient. This complex process is important to get right, and we need accountability at each stage.

Earlier this year, we took another bipartisan step toward reforms by launching an ongoing Committee investigation to examine several issues that have plagued the OPTN under UNOS’s

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management, including outdated technology and cybersecurity systems, conflicts of interest interfering with policy, and dismissal or unwillingness to address patient safety concerns and improve equity of access to the system. We also have engaged with HRSA for updates on the status of reform implementation and how the agency was preparing to issue new OPTN contracts to correct past issues with the system.

I hope today's hearing is another constructive step forward, as we hear from providers and patient advocates who can direct our focus on the specific areas of the OPTN where there are clear opportunities for positive change.

Fundamentally changing a nationwide program is no easy feat. HRSA's progress so far has been encouraging, but there is much more to do. It's important that Congress remains vigilant as we monitor the ongoing process.

There are few issues that garner unanimous agreement in Congress these days, but reforming the OPTN has been one of them. Organ donors, recipients, and their families deserve a system that works in their best interests. We must continue our bipartisan dedication toward that goal by supporting the agency with sufficient funding and exercising constructive oversight throughout HRSA's OPTN modernization and implementation of the reform law. I'm glad we are continuing that bipartisan work with today's hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.