

Floor Statement of Senator Sherrod Brown
Recognizing Eye Donor Month
March 10, 2011



Mr. President, March is National Eye Donor Month – a month to honor those who have restored sight to blind or vision-impaired Americans across the country.

For the last 28 years, since National Eye Donor Month was first established in 1983, the eye donor community has raised public awareness about the need for eye donation.

Every March for each of the past 28 years, our nation has honored dedicated individuals who work tirelessly at hospitals, medical centers, doctors' offices, and eye banks across the country to educate the public on the need for cornea donations and work with the transplant teams.

We continue to give thanks to eye donors – and their families – who offered one last remarkable gift because they had the foresight to become organ donors.

Eye donation provides a precious second chance at clear vision for those with ocular diseases.

Approximately 11.4 million Americans experience severe visual problems that are not correctable by glasses. A parent or grandparent cannot see their children or grandchildren play a little league game or walk across the stage at graduation. And many children experience momentous life events – and everyday happenings – without the eyesight that many of us take for granted.

Thankfully and miraculously, through eye donation and corneal transplants, vision that's been lost to disease or injury or infection can be restored.

Since 1961, more than 700,000 corneal transplants have been performed to restore sight to children as young as one day old and adults as old as 103.

And corneal transplants are highly successful; 90 percent of all corneal transplant operations effectively restore sight to the patient.

Each year, eye banks across the country provide 52,000 corneal grafts for transplantation.

Ohio's Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank (COLEB) in Columbus performed corneal transplants for 340 patients in 2010. COLEB gave these 340 patients an opportunity to regain their sight and, with that, the ability to see their loved ones again – or for the first time.

And in Southern Ohio, the Cincinnati Eye Bank for Sight Restoration Inc. partnered with physicians at the University of Cincinnati to establish programs for public and professional education as well as conduct ocular medical research. The Cincinnati Eye Bank is able to serve 30 hospitals in southwestern Ohio, northern Kentucky, and eastern Indiana.

In Northern Ohio, the Cleveland Eye Bank – which serves nearly 5 million people and more than 60 hospitals in Northern Ohio – created the Lasting Legacy program to honor the families of eye donors by publicly recognizing the donors' amazing gift of sight.

Simply put, corneal transplants – made possible through eye donors – change people's lives.

But more must be done. Some 1,600 Ohioans each year could have their sight restored through corneal transplants, but are unable to because there are not enough organ donors.

I encourage all Americans to consider becoming eye donors. Even those without 20/20 vision or who have cataracts can donate. In Ohio, you can become an eye organ donor when you renew your driver's license. It's that easy.

I also urge my colleagues to work with local eye banks and the Eye Bank Association of America to promote the precious gift of eye donation. While 700,000 people have had their sight restored since 1961, tens of thousands more are waiting.

During this year's Eye Donor Month, I thank all those who continue to promote and advocate for eye donation – and the gift of sight it gives.

Thank you.