



Reader Advocates for Additional Funding Sought for Marrow Donor Registry

By Howie Jackson

March 16, 2016

For people diagnosed with blood cancer who require a marrow or cord blood transplant, finding a match isn't always easy.

When I was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia in 2001, I didn't have a lot of hope that I would find a matching marrow donor. Not only was I adopted—making a family match impossible—my Portuguese ancestry made finding a match challenging.

While Be The Match, operated by the National Marrow Donor Program, did not have a matching adult donor on its Be The Match Registry, it identified six well matched cord blood units.

I'm alive today because of Be The Match, which provides doctors access to a national repository of banked cord blood units, as well as volunteer donors willing to give marrow to patients who need a transplant.

Successful transplants can cure fatal diseases, including blood cancers and sickle cell disease.

Having access to cord blood units is especially crucial for people of color—like me—who may have a lower likelihood of finding a matching donor.

Congress has always supported the national registry and cord blood inventory and now they have the chance to save even more lives. I visited Washington, D.C., recently to encourage elected officials to increase funding by \$6 million. This modest bump in funding would allow more adult volunteer marrow donors to be added, as well as increase the number of high quality cord blood units available for transplant. Cord blood saved my life. With Congress' help, it can save countless more.