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May 25, 2006

Christopher DeMuth
President
The American Enterprise Institute
1150 Seventeenth Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mr. DeMuth:

The officers and staff of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) were surprised to learn that AEI has scheduled a forum entitled “Buy or Die: Market Mechanisms to Reduce the National Organ Shortage” that will be held on June 12, 2006. We agree that there should be open discussion of all reasonable approaches to increase organ donation, and that the shortage of organs for transplantation deserves greater attention by policy makers. Nevertheless, we believe that the concept of financial incentives has been adequately debated for 15 years, beginning with the National Kidney Foundation’s 1991 workshop on “Controversies in Organ Donation,” and culminating in the definitive Institute of Medicine (IOM) report that was issued late in April 2006. We don’t see how an AEI forum would contribute substantively to the debate on this issue.

The IOM report is a thorough, thoughtful, and balanced analysis of the public policy dilemmas raised by proposals to increase organ donation. It was developed, at the request of Congress, by an independent panel, with members from a variety of backgrounds. The IOM committee concluded that any kind of remuneration in connection with the decision to provide organs for transplantation, even in the form of assistance for payment of funeral expenses, would raise indefensible moral issues, could affect patient safety, and, ultimately, would not reduce the national organ shortage. The National Kidney Foundation endorses the recommendations from the IOM report. NKF is unwavering in its long-established opposition to any initiative that makes organs a commodity and its aversion to any scheme of buying and selling organs.

There are other approaches to increasing organ donation and/or decreasing the need for organ transplantation that the American Enterprise Institute might want to explore. These include maximizing the effectiveness of workplace organ donor drives, evaluating the impact of paid leave for living organ donors, designing employer-based group health coverage that promotes early identification of risk factors for end-stage organ failure and appropriate interventions to reduce the progression of diseases that result in end-stage organ failure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Davis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" that loops around the first part of the name.

John Davis
Chief Executive Officer
National Kidney Foundation

