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# activism מעורבות

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## Lifesaving Cause



A consensus.  
Schneller Photo: Eli Elgarat

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## Knesset passes bill to boost organ donations

**Health Committee, religious authorities reach groundbreaking agreement essentially making organ donations kosher; lifting one of the major obstacles faced by patients' families when pondering issue; 'time of death' bill answers religious, medical, ethical dilemmas, says MK Schneller**

Dr. Itay Gal

A bill offering official guidelines to determine a patient's time of death, with the intention of increasing organ donations in [Israel](#), has passed it first reading in the Knesset last week, with 10 MKs voting in favor and two abstaining.

The "time of death" bill was a result of a long debate between MK Otniel Schneller (Kadima) and various religious factors, on the ways to make organ donations "kosher". Organ donations are scarce in religious sectors due to a lack of consensus among various rabbinical authorities as to the definition of "brain death".

In order to bridge the differences, the Knesset's Labor, Welfare and Health Committee has been trying to reach a common definition of the term, which would satisfy the Chief Rabbinate and Israel's prominent halachic rulers as well as the medical community.

In what has already been called a "historical move", MK Schneller has been able to mediate such an agreement, culminating in the vote on the "time of death bill", which states that a time of death will be declared by qualified physicians, in accordance with preset parameters, such as lack of blood pressure, spontaneous breathing, pupil reflexes, etc., as well as CFM readings which measure brainwaves.

### Confronting dilemmas

The bill further states that the medical team certified in declaring a patient's time of death, will include at least two senior physicians who are not a part of the organ transplant team.

These doctors will refrain from having any contact with neither the potential organ donor, nor with the potential organ receiver; and will undergo a special, six-month training by a committee made up of senior anesthesiologists, emergency medicine doctors, neurologists, religious representatives and ethics specialists.

Any family who wishes to do so will also be able to consult a rabbinical authority of its choosing, and will, of course, be able to decline donating organs.

The bill in its current form is said to answer various religious and halachic criteria, conforming the medical definition of brain death to the halachic one, allowing the religious impediment to be lifted.

"Up until now, a time of death was declared using repertory and pulse parameters only, essentially preventing organ harvesting from donors," explained Schneller.

"Brain death is irreversible and considered a death for all intents and purposes. Determining it as the actual time of death, while the organs are still viable, will allow for more organ donations.

"more importantly, we have been able

## Opinion

### A mitzvah called organ donation / Efrat Shapira-Rosenberg

Did you know that Israeli Jews have the lowest rates of organ donation of any ethnic group in the country? In a state that arose from the ashes of the millions who perished, the saving of life at any price could be expected to be the highest item on the national agenda. So why do we recoil from organ donation "for religious reasons"?

[Full story](#)

to reach a consensus among the religious, medical and ethics communities to view and rule brain death as time of death," he added.

The bill is expected to pass its second and third readings within one month. Schneller expects it to bring a surge in the number of people signing organ donor cards, as well as double the amount of organ transplants.

**To sign an online organ donor card, please click [here](#)**

[Back](#)