

TRANSPLANT LAW AGE MINIMUM AXED

Kids under 15 can give organs

Upper House votes in new transplant law

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A bill to revise the Organ Transplant Law and scrap the donor age minimum at 15 gained full Diet passage when it cleared the Upper House on Monday.

The bill, known as Plan A, which won Lower House approval last month, allows brain-dead children under age 15 to be an organ donor with the family's consent and recognizes brain death as legal death.

In a plenary session of the 242-member Upper House that began at 1 p.m., the bill cleared the chamber by a 138-82 vote in just minutes.

The current transplant law, enacted 12 years ago, forbids brain-dead people under age 15 from becoming an organ donor. Supporters of Plan A had aimed to revise the law to increase the self-sufficiency of domestic organ availability, but some lawmakers argued brain death is too sensitive an issue and thus should not be universally recognized as actual death.

Brain death, according to Japan Organ Transplant Network, means an irreversible end to all brain activity. People so diagnosed lose oxygen to the brain, which is different from a vegetative state.

In the case of an adult, the heart stops a few days after brain death, but some infant hearts can keep pumping for years, according to medical experts.

Given the controversial debate over brain death, lawmakers also submitted to the Upper House a bill that basically follows Plan A but clearly states that brain death is actual death only in cases of organ

donation, and another bill that would call for setting up a government panel to discuss in greater detail brain death in children within a year.

But the bill that states that brain death is actual death only in cases of organ donations was voted down, with 72 in favor and 135 against.

The remaining bill calling for creating the government panel was not put to a vote in line with the rule that the first one to gain a majority vote clears the chamber.

Despite the controversy, Plan A cleared the Upper House because many lawmakers appear to have prioritized responding to the voices of those in need of transplants before Prime Minister Taro Aso dissolves the Lower House for an election.

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