

EDITORIAL

Schakowsky Did Right Thing for Local Man

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Morton Grove Champion

Congratulations to U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, who helped pave the way for a relative of Erich Monzon of Morton Grove to come to the U.S. from the Philippines to donate a kidney to Monzon.

Schakowsky stepped in when the U.S. Embassy in Manila denied Monzon's request for a visa to visit the United States for the kidney transplant. She first sent a letter of support to the Embassy in November.

Then, after Monzon's mother spent two months gathering appropriate documentation to reapply for the visa, Schakowsky sent a second letter of support and then followed up with telephone calls to the embassy when she didn't get a response.

Monzon, 24, is hooked up to a dialysis machine 14 hours a day while he waits for a compatible kidney donor.

Monzon was diagnosed with lupus in 1996. Lupus is a chronic inflammatory disease in which the body's immune system attacks it's own cells. In Monzon's case, the immune system is destroying his kidneys.

Monzon's only hope for a good quality of life would be a kidney transplant. No compatible donors in the U.S. were found.

However, Monzon's cousin, Ben Liggayu, who lives in the Philippines, was found to be a compatible donor. But there was a hitch. The U.S. Embassy rejected Liggayu's request for a visa to enter the United States so he could donate his kidney for the cousin he had never met.

Before someone can be granted a visa to enter the United States as an organ donor, the physician and medical facility in the United States must certify that the applicant is an acceptable organ donor, and testing to determine compatibility must be done in the Philippines. That had been done.

But the visa applicant must also prove to the Embassy there is sufficient "strong familial, economic or professional ties that would compel the applicant to return to their home country."

Monzon's only chance for a quality of life away from a dialysis machine was through a kidney transplant.

We applaud Schakowsky for getting involved and making sure that the U.S. government did the right thing. We hope that the government uses better discretion in the future so people with life-threatening diseases in need of a transplant won't have to go through the agony that Monzon did.

Even with the risk that Monzon's cousin would remain in this country, that risk was far outweighed by the life-saving benefit that a kidney transplant will provide.