

# 2025 OPTN Runoff Election Candidate Biographical and Personal Statements

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***Third Organ Procurement Organization Representative (vote for one)***

***Brett Gordon, BS***

**President and Chief Executive Officer, Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency**

**Biographical Statement.** Brett Gordon serves as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency (LOPA). He joined the organization in 2024, bringing over 25 years of financial, operational, and strategy development experience in the healthcare, medical device, and service sectors. Under his leadership, LOPA has made transformative advancements in fulfilling its core mission of offering organ and tissue donation to families and facilitating life-saving transplants.

Mr. Gordon has been directly involved in organ donation and transplantation for the last seven years. Prior to LOPA, he was the Chief Growth Officer at Mid-America Transplant, where he served in executive leadership from 2018 through 2024, focused on strategic oversight and development of enhancing organizational performance. Before 2018, Mr. Gordon held leadership roles in several successful organizations, driving improvement and financial sustainability through strategic growth, process enhancements, and strong relationships.

Mr. Gordon has served as a national examiner for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for Performance Excellence through the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

Mr. Gordon has held board leadership roles in analytics, healthcare technology, and banking organizations. He is also a licensed (inactive) CPA in Missouri.

**Personal Statement.** I welcome the opportunity to join the OPTN Board of Directors as it embarks on its Modernization Initiative to enhance efficiency, transparency, and innovation in organ procurement and transplantation. This inflection point calls on stakeholders to collaborate on policies that enhance organ procurement and allocation, and to support data-driven strategies that improve transplant outcomes and save more lives.

I am particularly interested in ensuring data collection aligns with OPTN Data Collection Principles, enhancing data accuracy and completeness, optimizing analytics, and leveraging predictive technology in allocation and transplantation systems. By collaborating with other stakeholders, I hope to help improve the quality and utility of OPTN data to advance evidence-based policy development and support critical analytic work.

As President & Chief Executive Officer of the Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency (LOPA), I have firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities in organ procurement as it relates to organ donation, recovery and transplantation. I am eager to collaborate on medical, scientific, and ethical considerations that impact donation, procurement, and transplant operations.

Moreover, I have a unique understanding of the transformative work that can be done through modernization and performance improvement efforts. With a keen focus on innovation and collaboration over the last year, LOPA achieved the highest improvement in CMS Donation and Transplant Rates among OPOs in 2024. By working alongside key stakeholders, I hope to help enhance best practices and policies that drive the mission of saving and improving more lives through transplantation.

With over 25 years of experience across operations, finance, strategy, and organizational growth, my background blends operational expertise with data-driven decision-making and long-term strategic planning. A BS in Accounting and CPA certification (since 2005) supports a track record of aligning financial strategies for long-term, sustainable success. During my career journey, I have fostered agile leadership to drive organizational excellence by leveraging Lean principles and Six Sigma methodologies to lead and enhance continuous improvement across multiple industries and organizations, including organ procurement.

Furthermore, my leadership experience at different OPOs in vastly different parts of the country has fostered a deep understanding of the needs of our diverse population. As the industry strives to address the challenges and disparities that exist within different communities, it is important to remain committed to a data-driven, efficient, and transparent system that maximizes organ utilization, enhances patient outcomes, and strengthens stakeholder collaboration. Through strategic oversight and continuous improvement, the Board can ensure policies and practices evolve to meet the growing needs of the transplant community. Our work is more than a profession; it is a life-saving mission. Our commitment to our donor heroes and the patient waiting for life-saving gifts drives us to ensure that we do everything we can to maximize the gifts and save more lives. I look forward to this opportunity to serve on the OPTN Board and appreciate your support.

***Darren Lahrman, MBA, CPTC, BSRC***

**Executive Director, LifeLink of Florida**

**Biographical Statement.** Darren Lahrman is Executive Director of LifeLink of Florida, where he leads organ donation efforts across west central Florida. He has over 20 years of experience in healthcare, with leadership roles spanning clinical operations, hospital development, donor family care, regulatory compliance, data analytics, and information technology. He is part of the senior leadership team within LifeLink Foundation, the largest provider of organ donation services in the United States when combining its Florida, Georgia, and Puerto Rico service areas.

Prior to joining LifeLink, Darren served as Chief Operating Officer at Life Connection of Ohio and held multiple progressive leadership roles at Nevada Donor Network, including Vice President of Clinical Affairs, Director of Recovery Services, and Manager of Recovery Services. He began his career as an organ recovery coordinator at Indiana Donor Network with a background in respiratory therapy, providing him with deep clinical insight that continues to inform his leadership.

Darren is a Certified Procurement Transplant Coordinator, a published author in *JAMA Network Open*, and a member of the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO), NATCO, and the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE). His career reflects a sustained commitment to improving donation systems and honoring the gift of life.

**Personal Statement.** It is with a profound sense of responsibility that I submit my candidacy for the OPTN Board of Directors. For more than two decades, I have dedicated my career to healthcare, building the teams and systems that make organ donation and transplantation possible. This opportunity aligns with my lifelong commitment to serving those most vulnerable and in need: Our donor heroes, their families, and patients awaiting a life-saving transplant.

My journey began at the bedside as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) and phlebotomist, where I learned firsthand the importance of compassionate, hands-on care. And as a respiratory therapist, I treated critically ill adults, children, and newborns across emergency and intensive care settings. Through these experiences, I developed a deep appreciation for teamwork and the collective effort required to save lives. In the process, I grew to know and care for the many patients with chronic disease who relied on our unshakeable commitment. These early experiences forged my unwavering belief in the power of excellence in healthcare and the sanctity of every patient's story.

My donation career began at the bedside as a clinical transplant coordinator at Indiana Donor Network, where I supported donor families through their most difficult moments and worked shoulder to shoulder with hospital staff and transplant teams to offer hope through organ donation. These experiences forever shaped my perspective on the vital link between frontline care and transplantation, and the importance of meeting people eye to eye. Every donor, every family, and every gift strengthened my resolve to keep humanity at the heart of our mission.

From there, I embraced progressive leadership roles at Nevada Donor Network and Life Connection of Ohio, gaining comprehensive insight into clinical operations, quality systems, and business intelligence. Today, as Executive Director of LifeLink of Florida, and as a senior leader within LifeLink Foundation, my experience spans donation service areas in Florida, Georgia, and Puerto Rico. This gives me direct insight into the unique challenges and opportunities OPOs face in diverse socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic contexts, and reinforces my belief in the urgent need for a modernized national system that serves all patients and families.

My leadership style is rooted in curiosity, empathy, and a relentless focus on honoring the gift of life. I am committed to driving performance improvement and earning public trust through collaboration, transparency, and accountability. Above all, I believe our commitment to excellence requires us to put donors and patients at the center of every decision. And if given the honor to serve, I will bring energy, integrity, and strategic courage to the OPTN Board. I am committed to accelerating decision-making, leveraging the expertise of our partners, and investing in next-generation systems to advance donation and transplantation with a clear sense of duty to the communities we serve.

Our donors and patients are the reason we exist. I am fully committed to building a system worthy of their trust and sacrifice - a system that honors every gift, serves every patient, and fosters hope for all.

**Region 8 Associate Regional Councillor (vote for one)****Ryan Fischer, MD****Section Chief of Hepatology and Transplant Medicine, Children's Mercy Kansas City**

**Biographical Statement.** Ryan Fischer, MD, is a board-certified Pediatric Gastroenterologist and Transplant Hepatologist and Section Chief of Hepatology and Transplant Medicine at Children's Mercy Kansas City. He has a strong interest in clinical and translational research related to liver disease and transplantation, and novel therapeutics to treat disordered inflammation in the liver. His background in the lab includes basic research in dendritic cell biology, antigen presentation and cell-based immunotherapy. In collaboration with investigators at the Children's Mercy Research Institute and the University of Kansas Medical Center's Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Genetics, he is working to better understand liver transplant rejection and tolerance, and to harness the potential of engineered regulatory T cells in transplantation and other diseases. Clinically, he focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of liver disease in children, with a great deal of time devoted to children that need or have undergone liver transplantation or combined heart-liver transplantation. The Children's Mercy team specializes in liver disease related to congenital heart disease and Fontan physiology, steatotic liver disease, complications of advanced fibrosis and portal hypertension, and inherited causes of cholestasis.

**Personal Statement.** I "entered" transplant medicine in my third year of medical school. I was dating (and soon to marry) a pediatric intensive care nurse working at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) in Omaha. We would often see her patients and their families on evening walks of her dog. Our apartments were close to the local Ronald McDonald House and the kids that she had cared for would run out to greet us as we strolled. Her dog would zig-zag with the patients and their siblings while we joined in play or chatted with the parents. Their stories were equal parts amazing and heartbreaking. The science behind it almost unbelievable. In a time of textbooks and tests and uncertainty about where medicine would take me, I was certain I would work with kids who had received—or still needed—a life-saving organ transplant.

I completed my medical degree at UNMC and went on to a residency in Pediatrics at Nationwide Children's Hospital. This was followed by fellowships in Pediatric Gastroenterology and Pediatric Transplant Hepatology at the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, PA. I am currently the Section Chief of Hepatology and Transplant Medicine at Children's Mercy Kansas City. I have strong clinical and translational research interests in liver transplantation and transplant immunology.

In applying to serve on the OPTN Board of Directors, I want to ensure that the pediatric voice is clear in policy development as we seek to utilize one of society's most precious resources. While children make up less than 10% of all organ transplant recipients, we know that the potential years of life gained from a successful pediatric transplant are significant. I will seek to balance justice in organ allocation with the continued recognition of the power of transplantation in children.

Organizationally, I will bring my experience in the development of a high-volume pediatric transplant program and my service history to the OPTN Board. Since 2022, Children's Mercy has been in the top 10 both number of pediatric liver transplants performed and outcomes. Our growth stems from a willingness to build networks with providers and families across the region with open and accessible

lines of communication. Beyond the walls of the hospital, I engage in the OPTN's Pediatric Transplantation Committee where I participate in policy review, and in AST's Public Policy Committee where I advocated with members of Congress for the Living Donor Protection Act. I have also served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Ronald McDonald House Charities in Kansas City, and I currently serve on the Board of Directors for Gift of Life Kansas City, an organization dedicated to educating the community about organ donation.

My clinical work, my research, my volunteer time, and even my marriage intertwines with transplantation. I would be honored to serve the needs of the OPTN—whether on the Board or in a separate capacity—in any way going forward.

***Anthony Panos, MD, MSc***

**Professor of Surgery and Director of Heart Transplant and Mechanical Circulatory Support Programs, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics**

**Biographical Statement.** Anthony Panos is Professor of Surgery, and Director of Heart Transplant and Mechanical Circulatory Support programs at the University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics in Iowa City, IA. He earned his MD degree from the University of Toronto and then trained in the Surgeon-Scientist Program of the University of Toronto, earning an MSc degree and completing training in General Surgery, followed by training in Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery. His first faculty appointment was at the University of Washington. Through his career, he has been faculty at several universities, including the University of Wisconsin and the University of Miami, and he joined the University of Iowa in 2019. He has been involved with faculty governance, academic administration, research, education, community outreach, and is experienced with regulatory aspects of transplantation.

Dr Panos is clinically active as a Cardiothoracic Surgeon and is the Surgical Director and primary surgeon of the Heart Transplant, and Mechanical Circulatory Support Programs at the University of Iowa. He continues to serve as Region 8 Representative on the Minority Affairs Committee. His personal statement contains details of his extensive involvement, and dedication to, all aspects of transplantation.

**Personal Statement.** Thank you for the opportunity to introduce myself. I am an academic cardiothoracic surgeon with an extensive transplant background. My career has given me an exceptionally wide breadth of experience in the entire transplant system, from education, training, research, clinical work, patient perspective, philanthropy, governance, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Participating in the first successful lung transplant in Toronto during my residency inspired me to pursue the field. I trained in heart and lung transplant, mechanical circulatory support, LVADs (from pneumatic to current), ECMO, and newer technologies (temporary devices). I was OPTN primary surgeon for several heart and lung transplant programs, and I continue to lead our heart transplant program in Iowa. My research in myocardial protection/cardioplegia led to development of organ perfusion systems experimentally and clinically.

I have research experience in myocardial protection, physiology, MRI, and computer science. I have done clinical research in device trials (e.g., LVADs, TAVR, valves, stents) and stem cell trials. I am a grant reviewer for national organizations, (e.g. the American Heart Association), and an active journal reviewer.

My entire career has been spent teaching, from medical students, to residents, nurses and allied professionals. I have been residency program director. I have trained residents and fellows in all aspects of cardiothoracic surgery, including heart and lung transplant, LVAD, and ECMO. I was chief of cardiac surgery at multiple VA Medical Centers, including Madison, WI, which does heart and lung transplants (1 of 4 doing heart transplants, and 1 of 2 doing lung transplants in the VA system). I served on the VA transplant board, gaining unique experience with administration of the VA transplant system. I am involved with faculty governance at the University, served as vice-speaker of the Medical School, and was Senator at the University level serving on the executive committee of the Faculty Senate. I have been involved with administration at several universities. I worked with people from outside of Medicine, in the other parts of the University. We worked together in truly interdisciplinary teams. I currently serve on the OPTN Minority Affairs Committee, STS and Council of Science Editors committees.

I was part of OPO medical boards in Florida, Mississippi, and Iowa. I have done transplants from the west coast to the east coast, and Midwest. I did organ procurement from Alaska to Puerto Rico, the Bahamas and Panama. I was honored to be part of the Transplant Guild in Mississippi where we provided support to transplant recipients and their families. This gave me experience with philanthropy to support transplant patients. I learned about patients and their journeys.

I have been an active member of Region 8 since 2019 and have served as Region 8 Representative on OPTN Minority Affairs Committee. I have worked with my colleagues throughout Region 8, and valued the experience gained from working with Dr Andrew Kao and all of you.

I will bring my extensive experience with transplantation to the work of Region 8 as Associate Councillor. I will work to represent Region 8 and our needs as a Midwest region, with less dense, rural, populations, and our special needs for access to transplantation. I will work to assist the Regional Councillor in whatever is needed for our Region.

I believe that the Modernization Initiative is an opportunity to build upon the transplant system and make improvements. New technologies are coming that we need to harness for the good of our patients. These include the obvious areas, such as new methods of allocation/distribution, organ preservation, xenotransplantation, stem cells, and artificial intelligence. However, I am sure that there will be even more advances that we cannot foresee at this time. We need to be open to new ideas and collaborations. I believe that the OPTN can, and should, learn from others, in other industries and parts of society. We need to be open-minded as we move forwards with innovations that need to occur. I believe that my strength working with others, across disciplines, will serve Region 8 and the OPTN as we move forwards into the future. In the end, we all want to make the transplant system work for the good of our patients.