



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Kidneys for Communities launches its Kidneys for First Responders First initiative with New York City police officer's successful living kidney transplant**

#### *Initiative aims to help first responders waiting for a lifesaving kidney transplant*

July 6, 2023, TOLEDO, Ohio — First responders waiting for a lifesaving kidney transplant now have the attention and power of communities across the country. [Kidneys for Communities](#), a national community-directed living kidney donation program, launched its Kidneys for First Responders initiative with its first kidney transplant recipient, [New York City Police](#) Officer Melissa Quinones, with assistance from the [Police Benevolent Association of the City of New York](#).

“Through Kidneys for Communities’ Kidneys for First Responders initiative, more people who want to donate to police and other first responders across the country, including those who serve with the New York City Police Department, now have a clear pathway to help save the life of an officer who is battling end-stage kidney disease,” said Patrick Hendry, the president of the NYC PBA, who played a critical role in facilitating the donation to Officer Quinones.

Kidneys for Communities’ Kidneys for First Responders initiative is designed to improve access to and facilitate living kidney donations by connecting those who want to help first responders with those who are in need of a lifesaving kidney donation. The program is based on the Kidneys for Communities community-directed donation model, designed to foster connections based on the affinity individuals have with membership-based communities. Officer Quinones’ donation was initiated when an altruistic donor committed their kidney donation to support a police officer in the United States.

“The last few years reshaped how we define our communities and what connects us,” said Atul Agnihotri, CEO of Kidneys for Communities. “One might reach across the fence to help their neighbor, while another reaches across the country to support a larger community. The Kidneys for First Responders initiative connects those who want to support firefighters, EMTs and police officers by facilitating the living kidney donation.”

In 2018, after receiving an end-stage renal disease diagnosis, Officer Quinones, an 18-year veteran with the New York City Police Department, did not find a successful match among the many people in her circle of family and friends who offered to donate. After more than four years of waiting, the kindness of a stranger who wanted to donate to a police officer led to Kidneys for Communities working with both the NYPD, the largest municipal police department in the country, and the NYC PBA to coordinate Officer Quinones’ successful living kidney transplant in October 2022 at the New York-Presbyterian Columbia University Medical Center. The donation made to Officer Quinones is one of many in a paired kidney exchange that has saved multiple lives.

“As an officer, there are many challenging situations that I encounter, yet at the same time, I experience so much good within the community I serve,” said Officer Quinones. “I might never know the donor, but their appreciation of my commitment to serve is a beacon of hope empowering me to do even more to make a difference in the lives of others.” Officer Quinones returned to active duty four months after the transplant.

Killing more people than breast cancer or prostate cancer, in recent years kidney disease has been named by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a leading cause of death in the U.S. CDC data shows that kidney disease affects an estimated 37 million people in the U.S., and approximately 90% of those with kidney disease don't know they have it. Meanwhile, the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network reports that approximately 13 people die each day waiting for a kidney transplant.

“The community-directed model, now available to interested communities and pioneered by Kidneys for Communities, is a common-sense approach to growing the pool of living kidney transplant donors,” said Dr. Lloyd E. Ratner, director of renal and pancreatic transplantation at Columbia University Medical Center, who conducted Officer Quinones’ kidney transplant. “As more communities come on board, we expect it will shorten the critical waiting time for transplant recipients and save lives.”

### **About Kidneys for Communities**

Kidneys for Communities is a nonprofit that partners with organizations to impact the lives of their members by offering resources about living kidney donations to members of their communities, increasing the chances of a donor directing a gift-of-life kidney to a fellow member in need of a kidney.

Addressing the shortage of living kidney donors through proactive community outreach programs, Kidneys for Communities developed the first-ever national community-directed donation program. The program unlocks connections created through membership-based communities with the goal of increasing the number of living kidney donors in the U.S. through paired kidney exchange.

Paired donation is based in part on Nobel Prize winner and Stanford economist Alvin Roth’s contributions to algorithms that help match patient-donor pairs to one another so that each patient receives a transplant of a well-matched kidney.

The leadership team includes innovative leaders, kidney donors, social workers and medical experts in the field of nephrology and renal transplantation — all of whom have seen this disease up close and are committed to making an impact. To find out more about how to help first responders who are in need of a kidney transplant, visit <https://kidneysforcommunities.org/first-responders/>.

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