# 17-year-old's tissue donation rejection because he was gay



The family of 17-year-old Juleon Gonzalez is voicing their pain after learning that his tissue donation was rejected on the grounds of his sexual orientation. Grief-stricken mother, Christina Stewart, found herself confronted with a painful reality when she was informed that her son’s tissues could not be used to help others, as he was identified as gay.

Juleon Gonzalez, who was known for his quiet disposition and passion for football and graphic design, had registered as an organ and tissue donor in September 2024. His mother expressed her disbelief upon receiving a call from the donation registry. “It’s really hard, I’m still in shock,” Stewart remarked. She detailed how, during the discussion about the donation process, staff presented a questionnaire that included a query regarding her son's sexual orientation. Upon confirming that her son was gay, they were met with a complete rejection of the application.

This litigious situation stems from federal guidelines set forth by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which currently restrict men who have been sexually active with other men within the past 12 months from donating tissues or corneas. Such regulations have drawn criticism for being outdated and discriminatory. The executive director of Donate Life Texas expressed sympathy for the Gonzalez family but noted they could not elaborate on the specifics regarding the rejection at the time of reporting.

However, prospects for change are beginning to emerge. Earlier this month, the FDA proposed new draft guidance aimed at eliminating screening questions that specifically target gay or bisexual individuals, suggesting instead that donor eligibility should be evaluated based on risk-based assessments relevant to certain viruses, such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, irrespective of the donor's sexual orientation or gender. This recommendation builds on the 2023 easing of restrictions regarding blood donations from gay men, indicating a gradual shift in policy.

The implications of such policies are substantial, particularly considering the role organ and tissue donation plays in saving lives. According to Donate Life, a single organ donor has the potential to save eight individuals, a cornea donor can restore sight for two, and a tissue donor is capable of aiding in the healing of over 75 others. Despite the relatively high number of people willing to donate, only three in 1,000 deaths occur in a manner that enables organ donations, intensifying the impact of this loss on Stewart’s family.

“It just feels like a stab right in my heart,” Stewart expressed, highlighting her anguish over the missed opportunity to help others. “I feel like I need to speak up for him. [His tissues] could have helped 80–100 people, they said.”

The narrative of Juleon Gonzalez's rejection also underscores the ongoing struggle between contemporary medical needs and antiquated policies that limit access to life-saving donations based on sexual orientation. Families like the Gonzalezes continue to advocate for a future in which such barriers are eradicated, paving the way for equal opportunity in contributing to the health and well-being of others.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.frontierspartnerships.org/journals/transplant-international/articles/10.3389/ti.2024.12627/full> - This article discusses the reasons for tissue donation rejection, including medical suitability and logistical issues, which contextually supports the discussion on tissue donation criteria and rejections.
* <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm725253a1.htm> - This CDC report highlights the importance of donor screening and the consequences of inadequate screening, which relates to the discussion on FDA guidelines and donor eligibility.
* <https://ods.od.nih.gov/HealthInformation/How_To_Evaluate_Health_Information_on_the_Internet_Questions_and_Answers.aspx> - This resource provides guidelines on evaluating health information, including the credibility of sources and the importance of current and accurate information, relevant to understanding the reliability of medical policies and guidelines.
* <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-proposes-new-draft-guidance-blood-donation-deferral-periods-men-have-sex-men-and-other-individuals> - This FDA announcement discusses proposed changes to blood donation deferral periods, which is relevant to the discussion on easing restrictions for gay men and the shift in policy towards risk-based assessments.
* <https://www.donatelife.net/about-donation/facts-figures/> - This Donate Life page provides statistics on the impact of organ and tissue donation, such as the number of lives saved by a single donor, which supports the narrative on the significance of donation.
* <https://www.fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/questions-about-vaccines/tissue-donation> - This FDA page explains the guidelines and processes for tissue donation, including eligibility criteria, which is relevant to the discussion on federal guidelines and donor eligibility.
* <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/01/27/fda-proposes-new-draft-guidance-blood-donation-deferral-periods.html> - This HHS news release discusses the FDA's proposed changes to blood donation guidelines, reflecting a broader policy shift towards more inclusive and risk-based assessments.
* <https://www.donatelife.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Donate-Life-Texas-2020-Annual-Report.pdf> - This report from Donate Life Texas provides context on the organization's role and the impact of donation policies, which supports the narrative on the executive director's response and the advocacy for policy changes.
* <https://www.aatb.org/news-and-events/news/aatb-statement-on-fda-proposed-guidance-for-blood-and-tissue-donation> - This statement from the American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB) discusses the implications of proposed FDA guidance on tissue donation, reflecting industry perspectives on policy changes.