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Thank you to Chairwoman Handley, Chairwoman Sayers and the members of the Public Health Committee for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today.

I would like to offer the following in support of SB 673, an act concerning health insurance coverage for bone marrow testing, sponsored by the honorable Senator Handley.

It is difficult for me to speak before you today and tell you about the events of the past two years, but I am hopeful that doing so will help you to recognize the importance of passing Senate Bill 673.

It all started on April 1, 2005 when my wife Gina and I went out to dinner to celebrate the end of another week of teaching high school English. The previous two weeks had been mysterious as Gina and I wondered why she was covered in mysterious bruises, why she was a little more tired than usual, and why she was short of breath when walking up to the fifth floor of the high school. We knew that something wasn't right, and we were anxious for the doctor to call us back and let us know what was going on. On April 1st, in a matter of hours, we went from enjoying an Italian dinner on Franklin Avenue to hearing a mysterious voice mail message at home, to driving to Hartford Hospital, to being told she had an aggressive form of Leukemia, and finally being told that my wife, a beautiful, athletic, 25 year old had only a 20 percent chance of making it through the next two weeks. I could go on and tell you of the fear that we experienced, of the tears that were shed by Gina, our families or myself, but to do so would be to only state the obvious. Instead I want to focus on what happened when Gina beat the odds, when she survived those initial two weeks and the battle we fought together against cancer.

I still find it difficult to say the word "we" when talking about Gina's battle with cancer. After all, it wasn't me who had the intensive chemotherapy, it wasn't me who had to endure the bone marrow biopsies, and it wasn't me who was zapped by radiation. Yet, I know that my role in this battle was an important one. I was the one who talked to the doctors, worked with the insurance companies, managed our finances and updated family and friends on Gina's progress.

One of the most grueling parts of this battle for me, aside from watching Gina go through treatments, was managing our finances. Let me give you an example. Gina was transferred to Boston's Dana Faber Cancer Institute after a day of treatment in Hartford. I had to arrange and pay for housing for Gina's family and myself, we had to pay for food, as well as transportation to and from CT on a regular basis. Our prescription drug costs were in excess of a thousand dollars per month, and we face all of this while at the same time battling insurance for the right to have a bone marrow transplant at Dana

Farber. You see, our insurance company said they would pay for Gina to have a transplant at Yale-New Haven but not at Dana Farber, and with the cost of an allogenic transplant in excess of \$500,000 this was a battle that we needed to fight. We wanted to make sure that Gina had continuity in her medical care; to us it only made sense that Gina would have a transplant under the same care as the doctors who got her into remission. After help from Senator Dodd and others, we were granted the right to have the transplant in Boston.

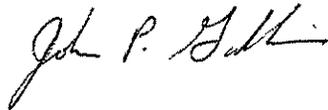
The next battle and perhaps the most daunting of all was finding a suitable match for Gina's transplant. A suitable match, as you will hear from other medical experts today, involves typing of the blood. A perfect HLA match would have 6 matching characteristics. Of course, our first hope was that Gina's sister would be a match. Although there is only about a 20% chance of a sibling being a perfect match, we held out hope and were extremely disappointed when we found out that she was not a match and that we would have to search for a donor in the International Bone Marrow Registry. For months, we heard nothing and our anxiety grew with the passing of each day. We knew that Gina's leukemia had a high percentage of relapse and without a transplant she might be back to square one. We held bone marrow drives in Wethersfield, at the high school where we both teach, as well as Worcester, MA where I grew up, and at the State House in Boston where I served as a legislative aide. All told, we added over 500 people to the registry; however none were matches for Gina. What was the difference in these drives? The ones that were held in Massachusetts were covered by insurance companies, and the one held in Connecticut required people to pay out of their own pockets if they wished to be tested. This is a shame. Connecticut is recognized as a leader in the United States when it comes to education, crime prevention and even health care, yet when it comes to helping to save lives by adding people to the bone marrow registry the state of Connecticut is found lacking. Today, we hope to change that with your favorable review of Senate Bill 673.

Fortunately, Gina eventually found two perfect matches in the international registry. Researchers at Dana-Farber told us that they needed to test these people further to ensure their HLA typing was a perfect match...they also told us that the cost of further testing was \$3,000. While \$3,000 on a teacher's salary is a significant sum, we knew that Gina's life was invaluable and wrote the check without hesitation. It was discovered that Gina had a perfect match! A 21 year old male from somewhere in the world gave so generously of himself that Gina was able to have a transplant and as a result, her life was saved.

When you consider this bill today, think of Gina and I. Think too of the 35,000 citizens of our nation who will be diagnosed with leukemia this year. Think of the 17,010 people who were diagnosed with cancer in Connecticut last year, and think of the financial burden that these families face every day. Today, you have an opportunity to ease that burden, and to take a giant step in moving Connecticut forward in the battle against Cancer.

I am pleased to report that from the bone marrow drives we held in Massachusetts and in Wethersfield, three people that we know of have been bone marrow matches for someone, somewhere in the world, and as a result, gave them an opportunity to live. Today, by reporting Senate Bill 673 favorably from this Committee, you also have an opportunity to give hope to those battling this terrible disease. We all know people who have battled Cancer. Many have won their fight while millions more have succumbed to their disease. Let's put the odds in our favor in this fight against cancer by supporting Senate Bill 673. Let's help to add people to the bone marrow registry, so that someday if you need it or your legislative aide needs it or your family member or friend needs it, the bone marrow registry will be full of quality donors willing to give of themselves so that more will join Gina in calling themselves a Survivor.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John P. Gull". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the "Thank you." text.