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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL 259

Senator Crisco, Representative Fontana and Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

My name is Nancy Cappello and I reside in Woodbury. I support Raised Bill 259 as insurance companies do not routinely cover screening MRIs - even for high risk women.

In CT, 36% of newly diagnosed breast cancers are at an advanced stage where the cancer has travelled to the lymph nodes and beyond. These late-stage diagnoses typically occur because of lack of access to appropriate screening tools to find cancer at its earliest stage when it is most treatable.

I am one of the victims of an advanced stage breast cancer diagnosis in 2004 despite a decade of normal mammograms, including a "normal" mammogram one month before my late stage diagnosis. Unknown to me, my mammogram kept failing me because of dense breast tissue.

When cancer is present, it is more likely to go undetected on a mammogram when the tissue is dense, even with digital mammography. Breast density itself is emerging as one of the strongest risk factors for breast cancer.

Ultrasound and MRI, when combined with mammogram, increase the detection of small, node negative cancers - which is what we want because later the stage at diagnosis, the greater likelihood of dying from the disease, as in my case.

I started a nonprofit organization called Are You Dense to raise awareness about dense breast tissue. With the unwavering support of Senator Crisco, Senator Hartley, Representative Fontana and you, two bills became law in CT - one for insurance coverage of whole breast screening ultrasound and a bill to inform women of their breast density.

While mammogram is considered the gold standard of screening - it is not a perfect tool. The US Preventive Task Force Report caused a national fury when these limitations were presented. I was privileged to attend a course last month by Dr. Laszlo Tabar who is highly regarded for his investigation in the random controlled trials in Sweden which demonstrated a reduction in mortality from breast cancer due to screening mammography. Dr. Tabar speaks of breast cancer as a continuum of entities - not just one disease and that family history, risk factors such as age and breast density, need to be considered when screening.

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Page Two

Dr. Wendie Berg's research shows that MRI finds hidden cancers even after ultrasound and mammography have been performed - and that MRI might be useful beyond the high-risk patients.

I close with a story that is featured on my website (areyoudense.org) about a CT woman who never skipped her annual mammogram - her 2009 mammogram was void of any suspicion, in spite of a persistent breast rash which deeply concerned her. Call it a sixth sense, even with a clear mammogram, she requested a Breast MRI. Her physician said she was not in the "realm" of MRI and that insurance would not cover it. She offered to pay for it.

The MRI uncovered an aggressive Her 2 positive cancer which travelled to her lymph nodes. The tumor was not visible on the mammogram because of dense tissue. How many women would be this persistent? How many could afford a life-saving MRI? What if she did not pursue the MRI?

We must not allow insurance company refusals and inordinate paperwork and pleading to obstruct an early breast cancer diagnosis. Let's leave those life altering decisions to the patient and her doctor to increase the survival odds of the 974 CT women who are diagnosed yearly with an advanced stage breast cancer.

I ask you to support the insurance coverage of Breast MRI and additional mammograms. Thank you!