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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED SENATE BILL 10

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

My name is Nancy Cappello and I reside in Woodbury. I support SB 10 as insurance companies often deny coverage of screening MRIs - even for women at a high risk of breast cancer.

In CT, 36% of newly diagnosed breast cancers are at an advanced stage where the cancer has travelled to the lymph nodes and beyond - 997 women. Many of these late-stage diagnoses 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 diagnosis. Unknown to me at the time, my mammograms 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. In fact, Breast density is one of the strongest predictors of the failure of mammography screening to detect cancer and is emerging as one of the strongest risk factors.

Ultrasound and MRI, when combined with mammogram, increase the detection of small, node negative cancers - which is what we want because the later the stage at diagnosis, the greater likelihood of dying from the disease. In my case, the pathology report uncovered 13 cancerous lymph nodes - a normal mammogram weeks before - is that early detection?

Armed with knowledge that many women were unaware of, I started an organization called Are You Dense to raise awareness of dense breast tissue for the early detection of breast cancer. With the unwavering support of Senator Crisco, Senator Hartley, and this committee, CT has led the nation with the passage of two bills - one for insurance coverage of whole breast ultrasound as a screening and bill to communicate breast density information to women through their mammography report. This inform bill has become the rallying cry for women in other states with similar stories as mine. Presently we have 3 pending bills - Texas, Florida and New York and four other states considering similar actions.

While mammogram is considered the gold standard of screening - it is not a perfect tool. Dr. Wendie Berg's research demonstrates that MRI finds hidden cancers even after ultrasound and mammography have been performed - and that MRI might be useful beyond the high-risk patients.

What has haunted me since my own diagnosis is the fact that there are women who follow all the rules, have their yearly mammogram and still may have a hidden intruder stealing their lives - most likely because of dense breast tissue. This bill will ensure that patients and their health care providers have access to another reliable screening tool to find cancer early when it is most treatable and survival is high. I never had that opportunity.

Those life altering decisions must be determined by the patient and her health care provider to increase the survival odds of the 2700 women diagnosed with breast cancer each year in CT.

Thank you for your continued support for the early detection of breast cancer for women with dense breast tissue.