Testimony for HB 440

Thank you for recording my testimony in favor of HB 440. I am 35 years old, and I suffer from chronic pelvic pain due to endometriosis. 1 in 10 women in the world have endometriosis. That’s the same number of women worldwide who are affected by arthritis or asthma, but unlike these other common conditions, endometriosis is widely underdiagnosed and mistreated. It takes an average of 10 years to for most women to be diagnosed with endometriosis. In the many years it took me to get appropriate treatment for my disease, I saw 11 doctors, took 23 medications that didn’t work, and had 6 imaging procedures, 3 of which required anesthesia. None of them were designed to treat, soothe, or detect endometriosis. My insurance company said that endo was a “diagnosis of exclusion”, which means that they will do literally anything else before attempting to look for a disease that effects 1 in 10 women. I suffered for years, and the insurance company got paid.

By the time I was finally diagnosed, many related complications had already taken their toll, such as: loss of fertility, painful sex, bowel disease, bladder disease, chronic fatigue, food intolerances, inability to exercise, anxiety, depression, and disability. Like a spider web, endometriosis sends out fingers of lacerated tissue. Mine also stuck onto my veins, causing painful, enlarged varicose veins from my hip to my bladder. Only 1 US insurance company covers treatment for this vein condition, and it was not the one I had.

My insurance agreed to pay for the radiological imaging to look at the vein, but not to fix the problem. The procedure to fix the vein was a minimally invasive, outpatient surgery. I live in Columbus, Ohio, which has some of the best hospitals in the country. I could have gotten the fix right down the street, but my insurance company said no. Despite letters of support from my doctors, despite being in debilitating pain on a daily basis, my insurance company refused to accept my appeals. I enquired on paying out of pocket. My quote was $30,000 min – max $100,000. No way of saying the actual price until it’s all done. I work a full-time job and I make $50k per year. There was no way I could afford such an inflated price. As a sick person who couldn't get treatment at home, I felt helpless.

In April of this year, I had surgery in Singapore. The total bill was a quarter of the US cost. I booked it thorough a medical tourism broker that I found through a google search. The brokers never once asked me to pay them. If Ohio continues down this broken road of unregulated capitalist healthcare controlled by for-profit insurance, then other sick people will make the same capitalist choice that I did. We will go elsewhere. We will take our money out of this country to get well.

I am very happy to report that my surgery was a success. It’s hard to express the depth of my gratitude upon getting my life back. However, I wonder about my future as a sick person in this country. As much as I want to, as a form of defiant protest, I can’t remove myself from the healthcare system. I can’t just fly to Singapore every time I feel unwell. I am sick. I have a chronic disease. I need insurance so I can get healthcare. I am an American citizen. So, I call my representatives, send faxes, and try to speak out. But I wonder if it’s enough. I wonder if we’ve gone too far. Is the system, run by those who are making money off our suffering, irreparably in control? Can our elected government officials stand up and make the right choice for people, not profits?

Please vote to pass HB 440. Ohioans deserve better.

Julie A. Palmer

471 E. Dunedin RD, Columbus, OH 43214